

French minister extends disputed visit to Israel

PARIS (AFP) — French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette has agreed to extend a visit to Israel next week, after Israel protested officially about the brevity of the trip, officials said Friday. Mr. De Charette will arrive in Israel Monday evening, instead of Tuesday during the day as planned, and will stay until Wednesday, said ministry spokesman Yves Dourloux. The visit sparked a diplomatic tiff earlier in the week, when Israel protested that it would only be 24 hours long. "The Israeli government is not happy with the organisation of the visit as it has been presented. This stay of 24 hours does not correspond with the three-day visit we were promised," the Israeli foreign ministry said Monday. The Israeli ministry's spokesman Yigal Palmor subsequently sought to calm the row, saying De Charette would receive a warm welcome whatever the length of his trip. Mr. De Charette will fly on to Syria on Wednesday.

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Palestinians protest peacefully against Jabal Abu Ghneim project, but tension runs high Israel, in obvious bid to cool nerves, suggests next West Bank pullout could be broader than agreed

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (Agencies) — Ringed by Israeli troops, hundreds of Palestinians held a prayer protest Friday near a hillside in Arab East Jerusalem where Israel plans to build a large Jewish settlement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday that his government will announce next week the scope of its pullback from West Bank rural areas due in March under peace accords with the Palestinians.

Mr. Netanyahu meanwhile told his cabinet that "the government will make its decision on the matter next week," according to an official statement.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) delivered a message to the nations of the world saying it was their duty to stop Israel from building the new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

"It is an international responsibility to stop this (project) and every nation must fulfill its duty to put a halt to Israel's settlement activity," Local Administration Minister Saeb Erekat said in a letter sent to world capitals.

Mr. Erekat told journalists the letter had been sent to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, U.S. Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross and his European Union counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos.

It was also sent to Canada, China, Japan and Russia, as well as Arab countries and "nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America," he said.

The letters were part of a diplomatic offensive by the Palestinians against Israel's decision Wednesday to build the settlement of Har Homa.

The United States and other governments have already come out against building the neighbourhood, which will eventually house 25,000 Jews in the Arab sector of the city.

"The nations of the world are unanimous in considering East Jerusalem an occupied territory. Therefore we call on them to work with the Palestinian National Authority in stopping this new settlement," Mr. Erekat said.

The decision to build "strikes at the bases of the peace process and could return both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to cir-

cles of violence," the letter said.

It also dismissed Israeli promises to build homes for Arabs in East Jerusalem. "Such rumours have accompanied every move to (Jewish) settlement in East Jerusalem since 1967 and have never proved true," it said.

Israel is slated by March 7 to further withdraw troops from parts of Palestinian areas in the West Bank under a Jan. 15 agreement signed between the sides for the handover of the city of Hebron.

The redeployment would be the first phase of a three-part withdrawal from rural areas to be completed by mid-1998 as part of the expansion of Palestinian self-rule.

But Mr. Netanyahu denied Friday that he had contacts with Washington or the PNA regarding the redeployment, after members of his coalition accused him of striking a secret deal with the Palestinians.

Mr. Netanyahu reportedly promised Palestinian President Yasser Arafat that Israel would enlarge areas to be turned over if he acted to prevent violence over Israel's decision

to build the new settlement.

The prime minister's office, however, denied the report, which has been widely picked up in the Israeli media.

But Israeli Communications Minister Limor Livnat said she expected Mr. Arafat would keep a lid on Palestinian anger.

"The Palestinians have used logic and reached the conclusion that if they want to advance in the implementation of (peace) agreements, it's worth it for them to sit quietly," Ms. Livnat told Israeli army radio on Thursday.

About 20,000 Palestinians attended prayers in the Old City here Friday without incident under tight Israeli security.

Some 500 extra police in riot gear were on the streets during the weekly prayers at Al Aqsa Mosque complex, as border guards deployed at points between Israeli and Palestinian neighbourhoods.

But the worshippers, whose number was around the same as usual for Friday prayers, gathered and then left after the service without incident, witnesses and police said.

Hundreds of Palestinians

also prayed Friday on the Jabal Abu Ghneim where Israel plans to begin construction in two weeks of the first 2,500 of a planned 6,500 homes for Jews.

The worshippers, who numbered from 200 to 300, marched up the Jabal Abu Ghneim hillside from the neighbouring Arab quarter of Umm Tuba, but there were no incidents with Israeli police.

Israeli Housing Minister Eli Isha'i formally approved Thursday the plan to build Har Homa and the supreme court cleared obstacles to the construction of the settlement.

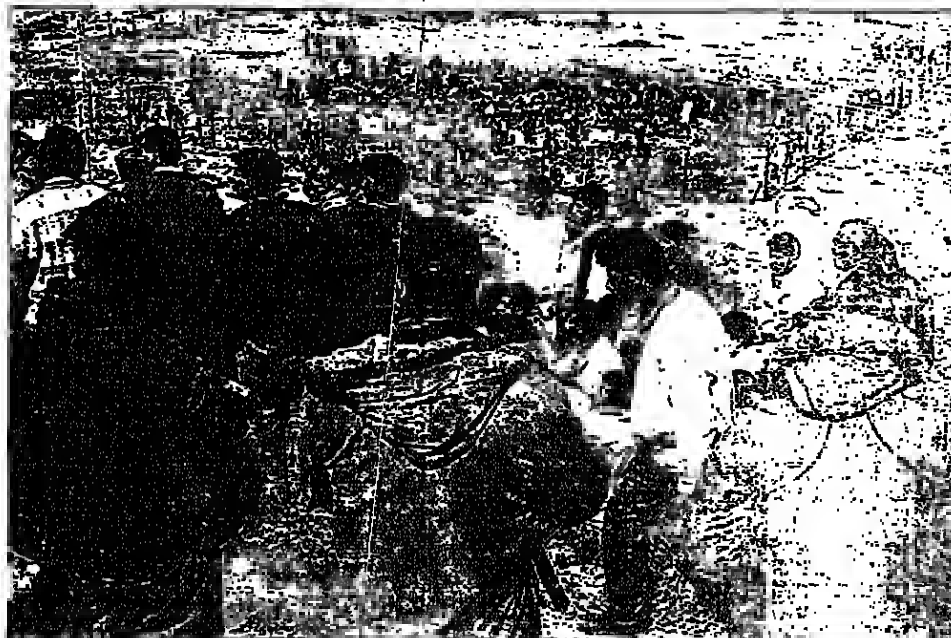
The court on Thursday postponed until sometime in March its hearing of a petition by two Israeli left-wing opposition deputies seeking to stop the project.

It also decided that other petitions would be heard in March, putting an effective end to attempts to halt construction.

The Palestinians, who want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state of their own, have warned that the project could scuttle the peace process.

The Islamic Resistance

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Israeli border police watch Palestinians praying on Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem in protest against Israel's plan to construct a Jewish settlement there (AFP photo)

King: Netanyahu should not think informing in advance will make his plans acceptable

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein has reiterated Jordan's rejection of Israel's decision to build a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem and warned that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should expect stiff opposition to the plan.

In an interview with Israel's Yediot Ahronot newspaper, the King also renewed his warning that the Israeli move would endanger the peace process.

Mr. Netanyahu should expect opposition to the move and should not think that projects such as the new settlement would be "acceptable to us just because we were informed of it in advance,"

The Israeli move, the King said, "could undermine all that we have achieved so far in the path for peace."

People who feel proud of themselves live on both sides and they should not be fooled or humiliated, said the King.

The King, in a strong message delivered by an envoy to Mr. Netanyahu on Wednesday, warned that the Israeli decision to build

a new Jewish settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim was a serious blow to the Middle East peace process.

The King warned that the Israeli decision risked damaging Israeli-Jordanian relations.

"The King warned that the implementation of the Israeli decision was bound to create new facts on the ground whose negative effects will adversely influence the positive feelings that have been prevailing lately," Jordan Television said.

In his message to Mr. Netanyahu, the King reiterated Jordan's stand, which was made clear to the Israeli premier during a visit to Amman on Sunday, that the Kingdom considers East Jerusalem an occupied Arab land.

As such, the Kingdom sees any unilateral change in the status of the city before reaching a final agreement with the Palestinian National Authority constitutes a serious danger to peace, Jordan Television said.

The King called on Mr. Netanyahu to reconsider his decision to go ahead with the Jabal Abu Ghneim

project and emphasised that the Israeli plan does not serve the interests of the people of this region, including those of the Israeli people.

The Israeli decision would undermine the credibility of the whole peace process and trigger anger that will unleash violence and endanger the building of peace, said the King.

King Hussein had sent a similar message to the late Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin when Israel in 1995 decided to confiscate lands in Arab East Jerusalem and Rabin responded positively to the King's appeal and halted the move.

At the time the United States vetoed a United Nations Security Council Resolution against Israeli measures in Arab East Jerusalem.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, who was reportedly expected to visit Tel Aviv on Saturday to attend a ceremony in memory of Rabin, has cancelled the visit in what was seen as another message of strong protest against the Israeli plan to build on Jabal Abu Ghneim.

Prince Ra'd undergoes leg surgery

AMMAN (J.T.) — Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zaid on Friday underwent a cataract extraction with intraocular lens implantation in the right eye at Ibn Al Haitham Hospital, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said. Khalid Al Sharif, the surgeon who performed the operation, told the Jordan Times that the operation involved removal of the diseased lens and replacing it by a clear new lens. Dr. Sharif said Prince Ra'd is in excellent condition and will leave the hospital today (Saturday).

Dahiyat named Muta University president

AMMAN (Petra) — A Royal Decree was issued on Friday appointing former minister Eid Dahiyat as president of Muta University as of March 1. Another decree was issued accepting the resignation of Abdul Rahman Anlyyat as Muta University president.

Turkey receives bids for Iran pipeline

ANKARA (AP) — Turkey's state-owned pipeline company has received 14 bids from Turkish companies for construction by 1998 of the Turkish part of a pipeline for Iranian natural gas. The United States has criticised Turkey's signing of a \$20 billion natural gas deal with Iran, which it accuses of sponsoring terrorism. The lowest bid, worth \$117 million, was made by Istanbul-based construction company STFA. It was announced Friday. But the government may name another company as winner. The pipeline will stretch from the Iranian border to the Turkish city of Erzurum, some 260 kilometres to the west. The construction work is scheduled to begin in April. An American law calls for sanctions against companies that invest more than \$40 million in Iran's energy sector.

Netanyahu pushed Bar-On nomination, report asserts

TEL AVIV (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his justice minister pushed their choice of attorney general through the cabinet despite reservations by several ministers, according to a transcript of the session published Friday.

The Jan. 10 appointment of lawyer Roni Bar-On as attorney general triggered a political scandal that reportedly may lead to criminal charges against top government officials.

Mr. Bar-On, a member of Mr. Netanyahu's Likud Party, resigned Jan. 12 after just one day in office amid criticism that he was a judicial lightweight chosen only for his political ties.

Several days later, Israel TV alleged that Mr. Bar-On was appointed as part of a deal in which he would end the corruption trial of Aryeh Dori, leader of the religious Shas party. In exchange, Shas was to provide the decisive cabinet votes for the Hebron deal, it said. Mr. Netanyahu's government also depends on Shas for its parliament majority.

On Friday, the business daily Globes published a

transcript of the Jan. 10 cabinet meeting in which Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi presented Mr. Bar-On to the ministers as his choice for attorney general.

The transcript showed that Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Hanegbi overrode concerns by several ministers that Mr. Bar-On's Likud membership and personal ties to Mr. Hanegbi should disqualify him. Mr. Hanegbi once worked in Mr. Bar-On's office as a trainee after graduating from law school.

"It is impossible to live in this country without adopting one ideology or the other and that certainly does not disqualify anyone from any position," Mr. Netanyahu told the ministers.

Mr. Netanyahu insisted that a decision be taken that day even after five ministers complained they had not been given enough time to consider Mr. Bar-On's nomination and asked for the vote to be delayed.

Ultimately, 12 ministers supported Mr. Bar-On's appointment, five abstained and one voted against.

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Iraq wants to increase oil exports under U.N. deal

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq is seeking U.N. approval to raise the amount of oil it exports under a humanitarian exemption to U.N. sanctions, Oil Minister Amer Rashid said Friday.

He said Foreign Minister Mohammad Al Sahaf was in New York to discuss the request at the United Nations.

Under a U.N. "oil-for-food" deal, Iraq started in December to export oil worth \$2 billion over six months, or some 500,000 barrels a day at current prices, to finance the import of food and medical supplies.

"This amount is below the food and medical needs of Iraqis," General Rashid told a press conference.

Iraq was looking for "a good increase to satisfy the basic needs" of its 20-million population and hoped the new level of exports would take effect on March 9, three months after the oil-for-food deal was launched, he said.

The current export capacity of Iraq is between 2.4 and 2.5 million barrels a day, said the minister.

(Continued on page 7)

Mr. Rashid said Iraq has already exported \$864 million worth of crude and that it hoped to have reached \$1.7 billion by the end of the first three months of oil exports.

Out of the \$2 billion in oil revenues, just under two-thirds of the amount is to go on humanitarian supplies and the rest to finance U.N. operations and pay war reparations for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The overall U.N. sanctions, including the lifetime oil exports, have been in place since the August 1990 invasion. Iraqi troops were evicted from the emirate by a U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf war.

Gen. Rashid also renewed charges that the United States was to blame for the delay in starting the distribution of food and medicine under the deal with the United Nations.

Washington "continues to raise obstacles to slow down the accord," he said, adding that only between eight and 10 out of 180-190 food contracts submitted by Iraq had so far been

No more censorship of foreign papers, magazines

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Press and Publications Department has stopped "reviewing" the foreign press before it reaches newsstands in Jordan, a senior Ministry of Information official has said.

"From now on, the department will not interfere and the newspapers and magazines will be delivered straight from the plane to the bookshops," said the director general of the Press and Publications Department and secretary-general at the Ministry of

Information, Mohammad Amin.

Mr. Amin told the Jordan Times on Thursday that the decision went into effect on Feb. 23 and was taken in line with a memo to the department issued by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti.

"The memo is in conformity with the policy statement the prime minister made before Parliament when he took office one year ago," Mr. Amin stated, adding that, in his government's political programme, Mr. Kabariti put great emphasis on measures aimed at enhancing

the free circulation of ideas.

Before the enforcement of the new provision, a special committee under the Press and Publications Department used to review all foreign newspapers and magazines entering the Kingdom in accordance with the 1994 Press and Publications Law.

The decision is also expected to speed up the distribution of foreign press and allow Jordanian readers to receive fresher and more recent issues of foreign newspapers.

According to Mr. Amin, around 60 to 70 foreign

newspapers and magazines from the Middle East and elsewhere are available in Jordan everyday.

The department will continue to "review" foreign books entering the country, Mr. Amin said.

However, the Press and Publications Department will "shortly" stop this practice as well, he anticipated, adding that the total abolition of the department's "preview" of foreign publications will come as part of amendments to the current Press and Publications Law expected to be proposed by the government.

Eight parties announce merger as National Constitutional Party

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Eight centrist nationalist political parties have formally announced their merger as the National Constitutional Party, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said on Friday.

The long-awaited announcement came after a meeting late into the night on Wednesday and capped several weeks of intense negotiations among the parties' secretaries-general.

The parties involved in the merger are:

— The Progress and Justice Party, headed by Ali Sa'ad;

— Al Ahd (Pledge), one of the strongest parties in the Kingdom, with two ministers in the current cabinet and five deputies in the Lower House of Parliament, headed by Minister of Housing and Public Works Abdul Hadi Majali;

— Al Waed (Promise), headed by Anis Muasher;

— The Jordanian National Alliance, headed by Mijhem Khreisha;

— Al Waian (Homeland), headed by Hakam Khair;

— The Jordanian Arab Masses Party, headed by Abdul Khaleq Shataat;

— Al Yikatha (Reawakening), headed by former Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ra'ouf Rawabdeh;

— The Popular Unity Party, headed by Talal Ramahi.

In a joint statement, the parties' secretaries-general said the decision to merge was taken because of the similarities in the parties' political stands and programmes.

The new party will seek the "enhance-

ment of democracy and political pluralism under the leadership of His Majesty King Hussein," the statement said.

At the international level, the National Constitutional Party's political programme puts emphasis on "the strengthening of inter-Arab relations, the achievement of a just and durable peace in the region, the full restoration of the Arab Nation's rights and the creation of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital."

The statement also called for the "Israeli's full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and South Lebanon" and the lift of the economic sanctions imposed on Libya, Iraq and Sudan.

At the domestic level, the National Constitutional Party's political programme aims at "ensuring equality among Jordanians of various origins and respect of all Jordanians' constitutional rights," the joint statement said.

The new party will also address some of Jordan's thorniest domestic issues, including unemployment, rural and badia areas development, corruption, and women's development issues, the statement said.

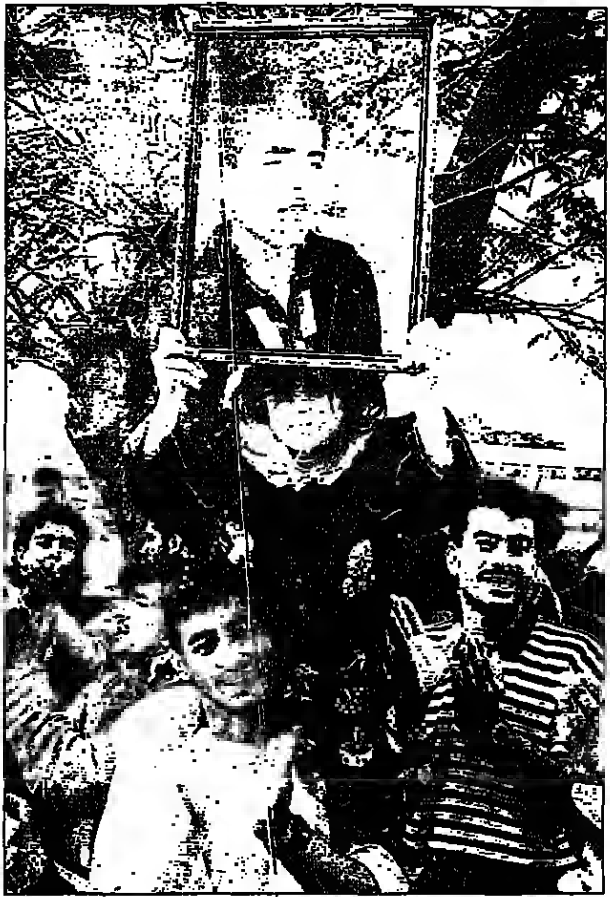
According to party sources, the leaders of the parties have agreed to hand in their resignations to make way for a new leadership to be elected in the new party's first general assembly.

Observers suggest that the new leadership will be elected before next November's general elections and the merging parties will field candidates in a unified list.

However, "when a unified leadership will take over is not yet clear," Mr. Khair told the Jordan Times.

Protesters urge Arafat to free prisoners

JERICHO (AFP) — Around 50 people demonstrated Friday outside Jericho prison on the West Bank to demand that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat release political prisoners staging a hunger strike. "What is happening to you, Abu Ammar?" the protesters chanted. "You must release the prisoners, rather than just obey Israel's orders." Most of the demonstrators were family members of activists from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Seven members of the PFLP were Friday on the eighth day of a hunger strike in protest at their imprisonment by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The PFLP and other opposition groups called for the release of their members from Palestinian prisons in reconciliation talks called by Mr. Arafat on Thursday in Nablus. Two jailed members of the PFLP's central committee, Ahmad Saadat and Mahmoud Fanun, are also taking part in the hunger strike, the PFLP said.



Palestinians demonstrate on Friday outside Jericho prison in the West Bank demanding that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat release political prisoners staging a hunger strike (AFP photo)

Iraqi health system near collapse, WHO reports

U.N. agency working with Sanctions Committee to accelerate approval of oil-for-food agreements

GENEVA (R) — Iraq's health system is close to collapse and medicines and other life-saving supplies scheduled for importation under the "oil-for-food" deal have failed to arrive, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Thursday. A spokesman said the United Nations health agency was working with the U.N. sanctions committee in New York to speed up its processing of Iraqi contracts with medical suppliers. The deal, which took effect last December, allows Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil over six months partly to buy food and medicine for its more than 20 million people suffering from sanctions imposed by the U.N. after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. But WHO expressed concern that diseases, including malaria and typhoid threatened to reappear in large parts of Iraq. Hospitals lacked basic medicines and electricity to refrigerate vaccines against deadly outbreaks of polio and diphtheria. WHO Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima and four experts made a four-day trip to Iraq which ended on Monday. Mr. Nakajima, a Japanese pharmacologist, visited hospitals in Najaf and Kerbala, two clinics in sprawling suburbs of Baghdad and

a health facility in Babel, according to officials. "Government drug warehouses and pharmacies have few stocks of medicines and medical supplies," WHO said in a statement. Mr. Nakajima was quoted as saying: "The consequences of this situation are causing a near breakdown of the health care system, which is reeling under the pressure of being deprived of medicine, other basic supplies and spare parts." Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Al Safah, speaking in New York on Wednesday after discussing with the president of the Security Council, told reporters: "Any practical person will see that up to now not one gramme of food or medicine has reached Iraq." Iraqi Health Minister Ummed Madhat Mubarak, in an interview with Reuters television on Feb. 18, accused the sanctions committee of delaying arrival of medical imports. At the time, he said the U.N. had approved only one contract of 347 submitted. Mr. Nakajima met Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz and Mr. Muharak, officials said. "He was there to look at implementation of Security Council Resolution 986.

There is a problem in the delivery and arrival of medicines, WHO will work with New York to speed up processing of contracts," spokesman Richard LeClair said. Kio Akasaka, an aide who accompanied Nakajima, told Reuters: "We were already aware of the worsening health situation. 'No medicine or medical supplies have arrived yet in the country. Some is due to arrive very soon,' he added. "We believe the sanctions committee is doing its best." In most of the country, WHO has an "observer" role to ensure equitable distribution of health products worth \$210 million to be imported into Iraq during the six-month period. WHO is also charged with directly distributing \$28.8 million worth of medicines and medical supplies in the three northern governorates where Kurds are under international protection. Joseph Hazbun, a WHO official, was on Mr. Nakajima's mission and remains in northern Iraq to check on distribution plans. WHO plans to employ 20 international staff, backed by 100 local staff, to observe government distribution in most of the country and carry out distribution in the north, Mr. Akasaka said.

Sultan gives new cooperation pledge to Clinton on bombing

WASHINGTON (R) — Saudi Arabia on Thursday renewed pledges of cooperation with the United States in the investigation of a truck bombing that killed 19 U.S. troops and Washington said it hoped they would be carried out. "We've been assured of continued Saudi cooperation and intention to work very effectively and completely with the United States, but specifically with the FBI, in our ongoing investigation," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said. "We are very pleased to receive the assurances of cooperation this week and we're counting on that to be fulfilled," Mr. Burns told a news briefing. He was speaking after talks between Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Saudi Arabian Defence Minister Prince Sultan and Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal. The Saudi delegation last week met President Bill Clinton and Defence Secretary William Cohen. The June 1996 truck bombing devastated a U.S. military housing complex in Dhahran, eastern Saudi Arabia. Washington has complained that Saudi Arabia was not sharing enough information with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Prince Sultan said on Wednesday his government was making progress in the investigation, but said the probe would not be rushed. Saudi and U.S. officials said arrests were made but they refused to give other details. "I think the FBI Director (Louis Freeh) has made very clear the importance of certain types of access by FBI agents in Saudi Arabia, and we're counting on that," Mr. Burns said. His comments stopped short of saying Washington was satisfied with the information it had received. But he told reporters that for Prince Sultan to give the assurances in person to Mr. Clinton and Ms. Albright was "a very important commitment."

Mr. Burns said Thursday's talks also reached "complete agreement" on the need to continue to impose U.N. sanctions on Iraq until Baghdad meets all its commitments stemming from its 1990 invasion of Kuwait and 1991 Gulf war defeat. At a luncheon on Thursday for the Saudi delegation Ms. Albright applauded Riyadh's backing for the U.S. stand on sanctions. "Our two nations share an interest in preventing Iraq from ever again threatening its neighbours either conventionally or through the development of weapons of mass destruction," Ms. Albright said. The United States took the lead in maintaining sanctions in force, despite reservations from some Arab and European states which feel they have gone on long enough and brought hardship to ordinary Iraqis. Washington said apart from satisfying U.N. inspectors that it has done away with its weapons of mass destruction, Baghdad must also meet other demands including information on the fate of more than 600 missing Kuwaitis. Saudi Arabia, which was attacked by Iraq during the Gulf war, which ended with the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, says Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has only himself to blame for his country's plight. But Saudi officials said they want to see the U.S.-led coalition which defeated Iraq develop a long-term strategy to counter possible chaos in Iraq should the Saddam regime rule collapse. U.S. and Saudi leaders also agreed on the need for continued isolation of Iran, Mr. Burns said. He said the United States learned on Thursday that Saudi Arabia planned to give fresh economic assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. He said Riyadh planned "a very large and specific allocation" but gave no figures.

Knee-capper freed from jail to join Arafat

A NOTORIOUS knee-capper has been freed from prison and given a job in the Palestinian security services, only a year after he was accused of killing nine people and wounding dozens of others. Ahmad Tabuk, aged 33, will travel this week from his home town of Nablus to Hebron to receive the epaulettes and insignia of a senior officer of Yasser Arafat's Preventive Security Force. Until Nablus was banded to the Palestinians in December 1996, Mr. Tabuk was the self-appointed sheriff of the city. As head of the militant Fatah Hawks, a youth militia loosely allied to Mr. Arafat's Fatah Party, none dared to question him. Even the Israelis kept their distance from the Nablus casbah where the masked Hawks, armed with guns and axes, held their weekly parades. Yet Palestinian civilians, not Israelis, suffered most at Mr. Tabuk's hands. His favourite targets were drug addicts, prostitutes, collaborators and any others deemed "undesirable." Some were shot dead by the Hawks; the luckier ones were knee-capped. When the Palestinians took charge of Nablus, for the first 24 hours Mr. Tabuk was fugitive on the run from Mr. Arafat's security forces. He was eventually discovered in a friend's home in the casbah and arrested after negotiations lasting several hours. "My husband is a hero of the revolution," says his wife Safa, aged 29. "We were surprised that the police came and took him to prison. They gave no reason." Palestinian officials say the order to arrest Mr. Tabuk followed repeated complaints from Nablus families who accused the Hawks of terrorising the city. But Mr. Tabuk's admirers maintain the arrest was prompted by the challenge he posed to Mr. Arafat's authority. "When Arafat came to Nablus and saw Ahmad's picture on the front page of the news paper, he was shocked and ordered his

arrest," says Tabuk's sister Khitam, aged 23. "He did not like to see Ahmad on an equal footing." Members of Mr. Tabuk's family say they remain loyal to Mr. Arafat, but in the same breath complain of the harsh conditions Mr. Tabuk endured during 13 months in jail. His wife, sister and four small children relied on family handouts to feed themselves and pay the rent. When they asked for help from the Palestinian (National) Authority, Mr. Arafat sent them a cheque for 3,000 shekels (\$600). The Palestinian leader's portrait is still stuck on the front of the family refrigerator, but his left eye has been gouged out. Before he was jailed by the Palestinian authorities, Mr. Tabuk was on an Israeli wanted list. He had previously spent 10 years in Israeli jails for a variety of offences, including throwing stones and petrol bombs at Israeli soldiers. But, because he "did not have Jewish blood on his hands," the Israelis made no serious effort to recapture him during the fading years of the intifada. As a member of the Palestinian security forces, Mr. Tabuk will find himself working shoulder to shoulder with Jews he used to consider his natural enemies. He will also be expected to protect both Palestinians and the Jews from nearby settlements. "He will follow orders," says his wife. Although he has not benefited from any police training, Mr. Tabuk is being assigned a senior security job in Hebron. But in Nablus there are mixed reactions to his rehabilitation. "He should never be allowed to walk free," says Maher, a local shopkeeper. "Mr. Arafat will bear the responsibility for letting him carry a gun again." A few insist Mr. Tabuk is a hero. He was never a thief, he never killed anyone," insists Majda, a student aged 21, from Al Najah University. "He took from the rich to give to the poor" — *The Sunday Observer*.

NEWS IN BRIEF

French Communist leader puts off Israel trip

PARIS (R) — The leader of the French Communist party, Robert Hue, is postponing a visit to Israel in protest at Israeli plans to build new housing in Arab East Jerusalem, the party said. "The decision to build a new settlement in East Jerusalem... troubles Israel itself as well as Palestine and the rest of the world," it said in a statement. Mr. Hue, who had planned a week-long visit to Israel beginning on March 3, has indefinitely postponed the trip "until conditions are right," the party said.

At least 12 killed in fighting in central Somalia

MOGADISHU (AFP) — Clan fighting in central Somalia has left at least 12 dead and 18 wounded, according to reports reaching here on Friday. The fighting, between the Murusade and Abgal clans, took place in the village of Awusweyne in the region of Galduduud on Thursday. It was the first interruption of a peace accord signed by elders eight months ago. Sporadic fighting also continued in south Mogadishu between followers of Hussein Aidid and Osman Hassan Ali "Ato," with a woman and her 14-year-old daughter killed by a mortar shell Thursday night. The city was quiet Friday.

Iran to launch project to build satellites

TEHRAN (R) — Iran will in the coming months launch a project to build communications satellites, Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's ministries of defence, industry and post and telecommunications would jointly start the project in the new Iranian year that starts on March 21, said Mr. Rafsanjani, quoted by the official news agency IRNA. He did not give further details. Tehran said in August it had signed an agreement with Moscow to transfer aerospace technology to Iran and help launch the first Iranian educational satellite within the next three years. The agreement provided for aerospace training by professors from the aerospace university in Moscow at the Sheikh Bahnei University in the Iranian city of Isfahan, it said.

Egyptians with sick children mob surgeon

CAIRO (R) — Thousands of Egyptians with sick children mobbed London-based heart surgeon Magdi Yacoub at a Cairo hospital on Thursday after he said on television he would give free examinations to children with heart complaints. The hospital called in police to protect the surgeon from the crowds and work at the hospital was severely disrupted for hours, the government newspaper Al Akhbar reported. Some mothers had travelled more than 150 kilometres to be at the hospital at dawn and meet the Egyptian-born doctor, famous in his homeland as the model of a successful emigrant. "The surgeon's visit to the hospital turned into a fiasco because of the crowds and the bad organisation," it said. The newspaper did not say how many children, if any, the doctor was able to examine.

Iran seizes morphine; 4 traffickers killed

TEHRAN (AFP) — Police ambushed convoys of drug traffickers in eastern Iran, killing four people, arresting three and seizing around one tonne of morphine, the official IRNA news agency reported Friday. The raids took place on Wednesday and Thursday in the heights of Tabas, Torbat-Haidariyeh and Birjand, all close to the border with Afghanistan. Seventy-four kilograms of opium and heavy weapons were also confiscated, IRNA said. The Iranian police said Wednesday that more than 150 tonnes of drugs had been seized here in the past 11 months. Iran is a transit route for opium, heroin, morphine and hashish from its eastern neighbours, Pakistan and Afghanistan, destined for Europe. A total of 160 tonnes of drugs were confiscated last year.

Medium-strength quake rocks central Turkey

ANKARA (AFP) — A medium-strength earthquake measuring 4.8 on the open-ended Richter scale rocked central Turkey early on Friday, causing minor damage but no casualties, the Anatolia news agency said. The quake's epicentre was in Corum province, 500 kilometres east of Istanbul, Istanbul's Kandilli Seismological Institute said. Anatolia said there was minor damage in two villages in Corum, but that no one was injured. The quake was also felt in the capital Ankara. A powerful quake measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale caused the death of nearly 100 people in the western town of Dinar in October 1995.

JORDAN TELEVISION	
Tel. 773111-19	
PROGRAMME TWO	
14:05	Cartoon — Mickey & Donald Adventures
14:30	Cartoon — Moomin
15:00	French Programmes
16:00	Gillene
16:30	Doc. — Practical Guide to the Universe
17:00	— Tih
17:25	Drama — Blue Heelers
18:00	French Programmes
19:30	News Headlines
19:35	Comedy — Hangin' With Mr. Cooper
20:00	Doc. — Magazine-01
20:30	Prism
21:10	Louis & Clark — The New Adventures of Superman
22:00	News in English
23:25	MacGyver
23:00	Feature Film: "Fatal Bond"
PRAYER TIMES	
04:02	Fajr
05:21	(Sunrise) Duha
11:40	Dhuhr
15:12	Asr
17:58	Maghreb
19:17	Isha
CHURCHES	
St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swefieh, Tel. 810740	
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785	
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590	
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440	
De la Salle Church Tel. 661656	
Terro Sancta Church Tel.	

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

622366	Deserts	03/20
Church of the Annunciation	Jordan Valley	10/24
Tel. 623541	Yesterday's high temperature:	
Anglican Church Tel. 652826	Amman 15, Aqaba 23 Humidity	
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331	readings: Amman 52 per cent.	
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751	Aqaba 24 per cent.	
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751		
Amman International Church Tel. 827126		
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328		
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457		
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932		
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691		
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295		
English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190		
WEATHER		
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology		
Temperatures are expected to rise with clouds appearing at different altitudes and winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.		
Min/Max temp.		
Amman	04/17
Aqaba	10/25

637777	Fire Brigade	617101
Blood Bank	775121	
Highway Police	843402	
Traffic Police	896390	
Public Security Department	630321	
Hotel Complaints	605800	
Price Complaints	661176	
Water and Sewerage Complaints	897467	
Amman Municipality Complaints	787111	
Telephone Information (directory assistance)	121	
Overseas Calls	010230	
Central Amman Telephone Repairs	623101	
Abdali Telephone Repairs	661101	
Jordan Television	771111	
Radio Jordan	774111	
Water Authority	680100	
Jordan Electricity Authority	815615	
Electric Power Company	636381	
RJ Flight Information 08-53200		
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200		
HOSPITALS		
AMMAN:		
Hussain Medical Centre		
Tel. 813813/32		
Khalid Maternity, J. Amn		
Tel. 644281/6		

FOR THE TRAVELLER	
QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT	
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights is obtained on telephone (08) 52700 or (08) 523250.	
ARRIVALS	
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	
08:55	Damascus (RJ)
09:40	Aqaba (add) (RJ)
09:45	New Delhi (RJ)
09:55	Karachi, Dubai (RJ)
10:05	Beirut (RJ)
10:30	Colombo (RJ)
14:45	New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:20	Cairo (RJ)
17:40	London, Berlin (RJ)
19:35	Vienna (RJ)
20:10	Leenz (add) (RJ)
05:35	Bangkok (RJ)
Other Flights	
12:40	Muscat, Abu Dhabi (GF)
15:05	Vienna (OS)
18:15	Dubai, Damascus (EK)
21:00	Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:20	Lamaca (CY)
22:25	Beirut (ME)
22:35	Cairo (MS)
23:40	Amsterdam, Beirut (KL)

ROYAL WINGS (RW) FLIGHTS	
20:30 Aqaba (RW)	
HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN	
Dep. Amman 8:00 a.m. every Monday	
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday	
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday	
Arr. Amman 5:00 p.m. every Sunday	
MARKET PRICES	
Upper/lower price in fils per kg.	
Apple	700/500
Banana	600/600
Banana (imported)	1000/900
Cabbage	100/40
Carrot	180/120
Cauliflower	380/200
Cucumber (large)	160/100
Cucumber (small)	240/150
Eggplant	270/140
Fava beans	850/600
Garlic	1100/900
Grape fruit	200/100
Lemon	430/250
Marrow (large)	260/150
Marrow (small)	460/200
Onion (green)	180/120
Onion (dry)	200/120
Orange	650/450
Peas	850/500
Pepper (hot)	300/150
Pepper (sweet)	450/300
Potato	340/150
Radish	70/30
Spinach	330/200
String beans	850/650
Tomato	220/120

Handwritten note: 08/11/50



Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor Thursday tour the Al Hussein Social Welfare Foundation and visit with the orphaned children who benefit from the foundation's care (Photo by George Crystal)

King, Queen tour welfare foundation, visit with orphans cared for therein

AMMAN (Petra) — Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor Thursday visited Al Hussein Social Welfare Foundation, which cares for orphaned children, and were briefed on the services provided to the children.

Accompanied by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kahariti and other government officials, the King and Queen toured the foundation and talked to the foster mothers employed to take care of the children and the foundation's supervisors.

King Hussein, stating that everything possible should be done to ensure a healthy environment for the children, suggested that the medical authorities concerned provide services to the children in conjunction with the Royal Medical Services of the Jordanian Armed Forces. He also urged the country's social and voluntary institutions, including Noor Al Hussein Foundation, to

pursue and intensify their social and humanitarian services in the country.

Later, Mr. Kahariti recommended that the NHF and other voluntary and philanthropic societies in Jordan supply the government with proposals and ideas to promote social services and provide better care for underprivileged children.

Minister of Social Development Hamad Abu Jamous and Director of the Royal Medical Services, Major General Yousef Qousus expressed their departments' readiness to provide further assistance to Al Hussein Social Welfare Foundation.

Al Hussein Social Institution currently cares for 185 orphaned children between one and seven years of age.

Their Majesties were also accompanied by Chief of the Royal Court Awn Khasawneh and HRH Princess Zein Bint Al Hussein.

Premier lauds PSD efforts to locate child's body

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kahariti Friday lauded Public Security Department (PSD) and other efforts to locate the body of an eight-year old child, who was carried away by a flashflood near the Seventh Circle last week.

Mr. Kahariti met with PSD Director Lieutenant General Nasouh Muhieddin and called for stronger collaboration with other security forces.

Referring to the issuance of computerised driving licences, Mr. Kahariti described himself as impressed by achievements made by the Drivers and Vehicles Licensing Department in using advanced technology to rapidly issue driving licences.

He called for the same technology to be employed in other licensing departments throughout the Kingdom.

The prime minister called on the PSD to provide the necessary training and technical support for Palestinian police and stated that the Palestinian police chief requested the provision of such support during a visit to Jordan last month.

Candidates participate in open debate to prepare for JBA presidential elections

By Laila Kellani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Strengthening the independent judiciary and broadening the rights of lawyers were the major issues discussed in a weekend debate among four presidential candidates in preparation for the Jordan Bar Association (JBA) elections.

In an open JBA debate, Hussein Mujjali, Association President and Arab nationalist, Saleh Armouti, Islamist, Zuhdi Dissi, seen to be close to Fatah (a PLO faction), and Omar Damrah, independent, discussed their election programmes and projected contributions if elected to the JBA presidency.

As Mr. Mujjali stressed his achievements as a three-term JBA president as well as his accomplishments in developing laws to grant life insurance, proper retirement, social security and higher fees to lawyers. Mr. Dissi countered that no one person has the right to claim such accomplishments as his own.

"Every lawyer contributed to developing JBA laws and no one person can monopolise these accomplishments," he said.

Other candidates mainly focused on what they perceived as flaws in relation to the JBA's "weak" political stands vis-à-vis Iraq, Sudan and Libya as well as the need for a stronger protest against normalisation of ties with Israel.

They also stressed the need for a redefined judiciary system, independent of the executive authority's control.

"Currently the minister of justice has the right to dissolve the elected executive council of the JBA. He also has the right to transfer a judge from one location to another," Mr. Armouti said, adding that such rights affect the "objectivity" of the legal system to a certain extent.

Mr. Damrah asserted that he and his "Independent Lawyers List" (ILL) will stand firmly against any interference with the judicial authority. He stressed that the ILL will coordinate with specialised parties to stop "usurping" the civil courts' authorities, by sending cases to the State Security and Military Courts as currently practised. He also stressed the need for a constitutional court in order to "interpret the constitution and cancel current unconstitutional laws."

The candidates also pointed to "shortcomings" of the JBA in guaranteeing lawyers' legal immunity against "unjustified" suspensions against them as decreed by judges.

Mr. Armouti vowed that, once elected, he will work on granting lawyers immunity such as is presently enjoyed by judges. He said that a judge should not have the right to suspend a lawyer and that such a right should only be granted to a JBA committee.

"[The JBA] should form a committee to study suspension cases filed against lawyers and rule as to whether or not such decisions are justified," he said. This right of suspension, duly granted to judges, is "mis-

used," especially as cases in Jordan are usually presented in a written form and that therefore suspension, on the basis of contempt of the court, is invalid, he added.

Mr. Mujjali stated that trainee lawyers should be properly instructed and that in 1985 he gave the executive council the right to hold JBA exams and that he will not modify this decision.

"The market is saturated with lawyers and we need to organise these issues from their roots," he said.

Only a handful of lawyers passed the last JBA exams which are taken after a graduate student of law finishes a two-year training.

Although the Islamists were close to winning the presidency by-elections in April, no Islamist has ever managed to win the presidential seat and the association has always been controlled by a coalition representing Arab nationalists, leftists and Baathists.

Regarding this year's election, expected to be a fierce competition between Islamists and Arab nationalists, Mr. Armouti believes that he could set a precedent as the younger generation of lawyers voted in his favor last year.

Such lawyers, who voted for Mr. Armouti last year, told the Jordan Times that their votes were not based on any political affiliation but on what they felt each candidate could provide for the association.

So far, 50 lawyers are running for the 10-seat council.

Results tabulated for municipal elections

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kahariti Friday described Wednesday's municipal council elections as very successful and maintaining a high degree of integrity.

Results witnessed the re-election of Ibtisam Furaihat as council member for the Rajeh township in the Ajloun district.

The elections held in Irbid, Tafleeh, Madaba, Balqa, Mafragh and Ajloun brought the following people to public office:

Irbid

Jihfiyeh: Mayor: Ziad Abdullah Talafih 411 votes. Members: Ibrahim Saleh Talafih 430 votes, Mohammad Awad Talafih 420 votes, Ahmad Farhan Talafih 412 votes, Gbazi Mohammad Talafih 394 votes, Omar Salim Talafih 394 votes, Mahmoud Ali Al Talafih 385 votes.

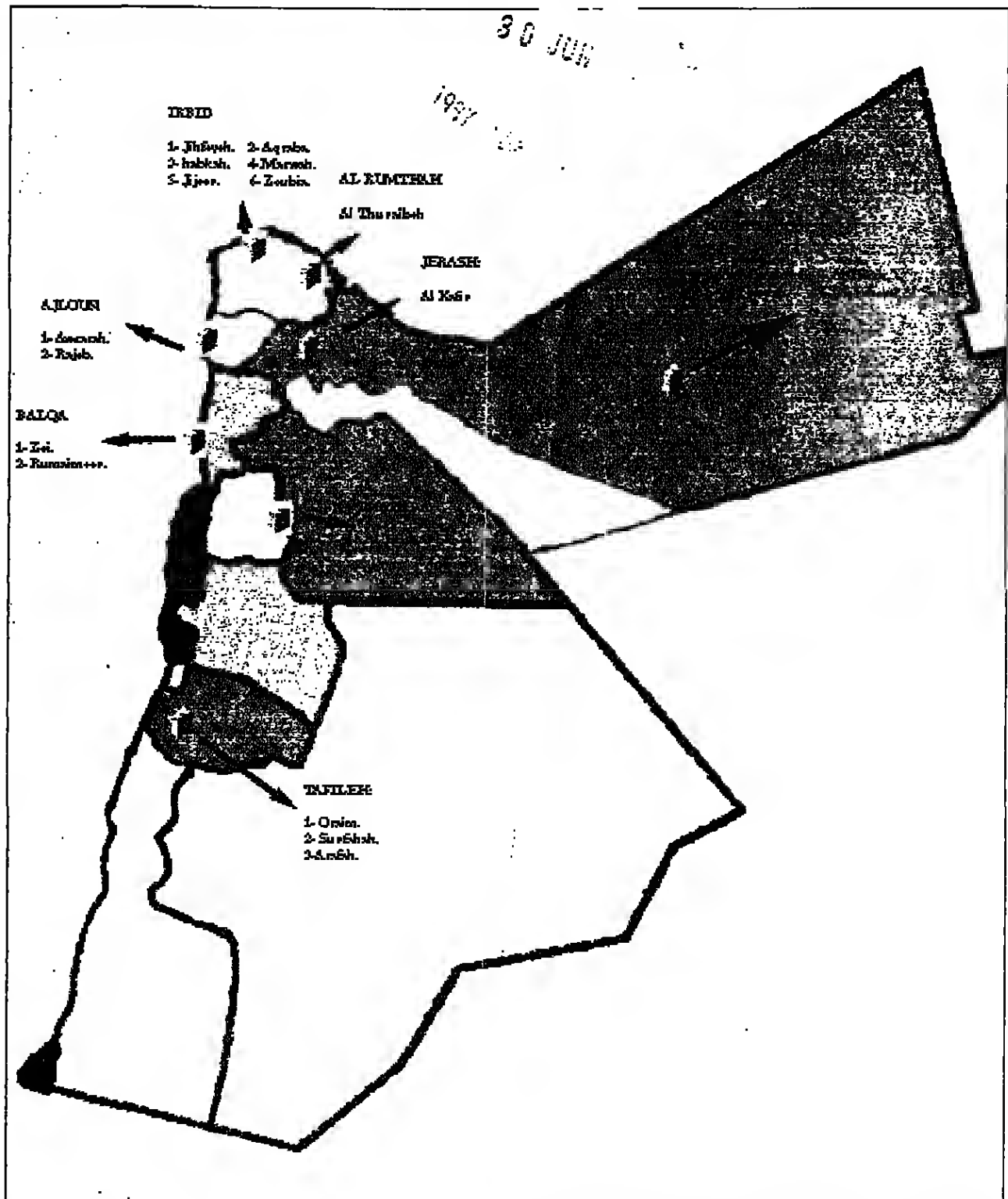
Aqraba: Mayor: Ahul Salam Yousef Shutaizat. Members: Kayed Fayadh Shutiyyat 323 votes, Thuqan Mohammad Hamadinah 316 votes, Salem Abdullah Bani Khalid 314 votes, Ibtisam Mahmoud Sari 311 votes, Mohammad Khalid Sohuh 267 votes, Ahmad Yousef Shutaizat 256 votes.

Habakah: Mayor: Abdul Fatah Ali Omari 352 votes. Members: Turki Ali Omari 337 votes, Salim Saleem Omari 334 votes, Ahmed Mohammad Hamasba 333 votes, Mohammad Khalil Omari 330 votes, Abdul Karim Yasin Omari 321, Ahmed Hasan Omari 321 votes.

Marwah: Mayor: Mohammad Said Omari 597 votes. Members: Yahya Nawaf Omari 534 votes, Mohammad Hasan Omari 525 votes, Munther Mohammad Mazari 523 votes, Yousef Abdullah Abu Qamar 515 votes, Hasan Ahmad Karaki 515 votes, Taysir Khalifah Omari 505 votes.

Jijeon: Mayor: Mohammad Jida'an Azam. Members: Sami Raji Amarat, Mahmoud Yousef Azam, Ahmad Ibrahim Azam, Yahya Mahmoud Qweitin, Ali Mohammad Azam.

Zoubia: Mayor: Ghalib Abdul Rahim Daradkeh 529 votes. Members: Mahmoud Saleh Daradkeh 530 votes, Marwan Ulayan Daradkeh 527, Hussein Munawer Daradkeh 525 votes, Ibrahim Ali Daradkeh 522 votes, Ahmad Mahmoud Daradkeh 520 votes, Fayez Mahmoud Daradkeh 520 votes.



Mafragh

Fa'a: Mayor: Turki Tayil Mufleh 295 votes. Members: Fahad Tawafah 304 votes, Hamdan Tawafah 288 votes, Mahmoud Abdullah 284 votes, Izzat Kaheeni 283 votes, Barakat Hamad 282 votes, Mahmoud Abdul Karim 266 votes.

Al Mansourah: Mayor: Khalaf Jazi Bar'i. Members: Fahad Khalaf Bar'i 261 votes, Khalid Khalaf Sarhan 233 votes, Nashmi Muncizil 232 votes, Aziz Bar'i 230 votes, Mohammad Khalid 219 votes, Aref A'id Bar'i 214 votes.

Al Harsb: Mayor: Ali Qasim Salim 207 votes. Members: Eid Fahad Salim 230 votes, Hisham Mohammad Shura'ah 202 votes, Ali M'jali Salim 202 votes, Abdul Karim Za'id 202 votes, Mahmoud Nahar Khatir 197 votes, Khalif

Mahmoud Shuta'iwi 195 votes.

Manshieh: Mayor: Ali Ibrahim Shura'ah 247 votes. Members: Khalaf Radad Khalid 265 votes, Abdul Hanid Nu'aimat 246 votes, Said Naser Shura'ah 240 votes, Sha'im Riyahi 235 votes, Atallah Shuwa'ir 230 votes, Ulayan Sharafat 205 votes.

Madaba

Al Jabal Al Sharqi: Mayor: Surour Abdullah Ajaleen 314 votes. Members: Abdul Razaq Suleimat 324 votes, Abdul Aziz Ajaleen 323 votes, Abdul Hadi Hawawsheh 322 votes, Mohammad Ajaleen 322 votes, Khalaf Ajaleen 321 votes, Hamad Ajaleen 319 votes.

Ajloun

Awsarah: Mayor: Hamdan Bu'airat 373 votes. Mem-

bers: Sami Bu'airat 357 votes, Mohammad Hasan Bu'airat 346 votes, Ahmad Saleh Bu'airat 335 votes, Mohammad Abdullah Bu'airat 333 votes, Ahmad Ali Mahashi 331 votes, Ahmad Ali Ghazu 330 votes.

Rajeb: Mayor: Naser Mohammad Furaihat 402 votes. Members: Ibtisam Furaihat 427 votes, Yousef Ananzeh 424 votes, Khalaf Dabseh 404 votes, Ahmad Nu'aimat 394 votes, Abdul Nour Furaihat 382 votes, Hussein Furaihat 381 votes.

Tafleeh

Arafah: Sunfaha and Orain: Mayor: Abdul Razaq Sawlqah 492 votes. Members: Mohammad Jadallah Sawlqah 490 votes, Ibrahim Sawlqah 483 votes, Hatim Sawlqah 480 votes, Mohammad Mutlaq Sawlqah 473 votes.

Mohammad Yahya Sawlqah 472 votes, Awad Sawlqah 464 votes.

Balqa

Ze: Mayor: Abed Musleh Amayreh. Members: Mohammad Nahar Alqun 727 votes, Amjad Masri 661 votes, Mohammad Suleiman Faleh 649 votes, Ali Rahaleh 605 votes, Hamud Amayreh 543 votes, Adel Abu Humur 541 votes.

Rumamein: Mayor: Yaqouh Fa'ouri. Members: Saleh Qutashat 429 votes, Fuad Mohammad Hamad 411 votes, Baker Shuta'iwi 409 votes, Jamal Aref Ba'jawi 408 votes, Hamdan Kharabsheh 406 votes, Hasan Saleh Saber 402 votes.

Minister, university president deny pressure applied for resignation

By Sacha Baggili
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Minister of Higher Education Abdullah Ensour Friday told the Jordan Times that the resignation of Muta University President Abdul Rahman Attiyat was purely voluntary and not the result of a Prime Ministry request as reported by the Arabic weekly tabloid Shihan.

Shihan reported Thursday that Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kahariti warned Dr. Attiyat that if he did not resign from his post at Muta University, he would face charges of corruption as justified by certain documents in the premier's possession.

Mr. Ensour maintained that neither he nor the prime minister played any role in Dr. Attiyat's resignation last week.

"This was a voluntary decision on Dr. Attiyat's behalf and I am not able to comment on the reasons behind it as they were personal," he said.

When contacted by the Jordan Times, members of the teaching staff at Muta, requesting anonymity, asserted that complaints of corruption against the university president were taken to HRH Prince Zaid Ben Shaker, chairman of the university's Royal

Committee.

"Accusations against Dr. Attiyat, including complaints that he abused the right to grant scholarships to students, that he made decisions without the necessary consensus of his staff and that he misused his power to appoint people to positions at the university, were taken to Prince Zaid Ben Shaker last year," one university tutor averred.

"These complaints, submitted by a so-called 'opposition group' formed amongst teaching staff, met with a sympathetic response from the committee chairman who promised to investigate the situation," he added.

"Dr. Attiyat ruled the university," a second Muta University tutor said. "He polarised relations between staff members; those favoured by him and those who opposed him."

Other university tutors at Muta told the Jordan Times that they were uninformed of the reasons behind Dr. Attiyat's resignation.

"We haven't officially been told why he has resigned, but it seems odd that he did so, a mere four months before the end of his term," another tutor said.

When this reporter interviewed Dr. Attiyat, himself, "outside pressures from the

Karak community," was the reason given for his resignation after four years as university president.

"Certain members of the Karak community were pressuring me with complaints that I did not employ enough members of their community at the university," he said.

"Just a few months ago, I held a meeting with community representatives. At this meeting I showed them documents proving that 1,160 local residents were employed at the university, but the pressure has continued," Dr. Attiyat stated.

He insisted that his term was not due to end until December and that his method of "resisting the pressure" would take the form of a return to teaching chemistry at the University of Yarmouk.

Criminal Court postpones 'Udwan Mills' retrial

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Criminal Court last week postponed the retrial of 10 people, five of whom having been sentenced to death last year, to March 29.

The same court will issue a revised ruling.

At that time, the court will "either issue a verdict against the defendants or decide to study other evidence in the case," according to judicial sources.

The defendants are part of an original group of 12 people, including two women, nicknamed "Udwan Mills," who, in 1995, were declared guilty of committing five murders, several armed robberies, thefts, attempted murder, kidnapping and fraud.

Two of the murder victims were security officers. Two of the original 12 defendants were declared innocent of any wrongdoing while 10 received sentences ranging from 10 years to death.

The Court of Cassation, which subsequently reviewed the case for six months, returned the case to the Criminal Court in April 1996, ruling that the

laner based its ruling on the defendants' own confessions and neglected to study applicable evidence.

It justified its decision as "the defendants claimed they were interrogated and forced to confess."

During the six-month retrial the court called several witnesses, including a laboratory expert who testified in court that hair samples found in the hands of one of the victims did not match any of the defendants.

During Thursday's court session, the prosecution repeated its call to press all charges against the defendants.

The defence team, however, requested that the court tribunal follow the ruling of the higher court.

The case, one of the longest in Jordan's history, lasted three years and the court heard 160 witnesses.

The group, initially tried at the State Security Court, was nicknamed "Udwan Mills" as they were captured in a police raid in the Udwan Mills village in Sukhneh.

Yeltsin, Clinton discuss March summit by phone

MOSCOW (R) — U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian leader Boris Yeltsin spoke to each other by telephone Thursday and agreed on an agenda for their March summit in Helsinki, the Kremlin press service said.

The two leaders also discussed bilateral ties, disarmament and the thorny issue of relations between Russia and NATO during their 20-minute conversation, it said in a statement.

"The presidents of Russia and the United States ordered their experts to intensify their work in all directions and expressed their mutual aspiration to make the meeting in Helsinki fruitful and successful," the statement said.

Earlier Thursday Russian and U.S. officials in Helsinki completed preparations for the March 20-21 summit.

Mr. Clinton and Mr. Yeltsin will hold their talks at Mantiyemi, the Finnish president's residence in the suburb of Meilahti, the Kremlin Press Service said.

The summit is expected to focus mainly on NATO's planned eastward expansion to include former Warsaw Pact countries — something Moscow fiercely opposes as a direct threat to its own security.

On a recent trip to Moscow U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made clear that NATO would press on with plans to invite several former Communist countries to join the Atlantic alliance this summer, regardless of Russian objections.

However she also offered some concessions to make the plans more palatable to Moscow and reported "important progress" in her discussions with Russian leaders.

Last weekend Mr. Yeltsin, recently recovered from a bout of pneumonia, said he believed a compromise could be found in Helsinki.

Mr. Yeltsin has a good personal rapport with Mr. Clinton. Meanwhile, President Yeltsin held talks Thursday with a high-flying army general after hastily summoning him from Russia's far east, heightening speculation he may sack his defence minister in a government reshuffle.

Mr. Yeltsin met General Viktor Chechevov, commander of the Far East military district and a potential successor to Defence Minister Igor Rodionov.

Mayak Radio reported that Gen. Rodionov had cancelled a trip to Armenia scheduled for next week, just before Mr. Yeltsin is expected to announce changes in the government. It did not say why Gen. Rodionov's trip had been cancelled and the Defence Ministry declined to comment on the report.

Gen. Chechevov told Interfax News Agency he and the president had discussed military reforms. The general denied he had been offered any new post but said reforms were urgently needed to improve conditions in the cash-strapped armed forces.

"I told the president the troops are controllable and capa-

ble of functioning at the moment, but the situation is serious, as in Stalingrad," said Gen. Chechevov, referring to one of the fiercest battles of World War II.

One million people were killed in the battle of Stalingrad, between July 1942 and February 1943. The Soviet victory over the Nazi invaders at what is now called Volgograd helped turn the tide of the war.

Russian newspapers said Gen. Rodionov's fate hung in the balance after a public rebuke by Mr. Yeltsin Wednesday, although they played down rumours that Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was about to be sacked in the reshuffle, expected late next week.

"Rodionov has been warned but not yet fired," the newspaper Kommersant daily wrote. "The president is starting the search for his successor."

Mr. Yeltsin gives few audiences to regional army commanders and the liberal Izvestia newspaper said defence specialists regarded the unexpected meeting as "sensational" and that it could herald big changes in the military top brass.

Izvestia said Mr. Yeltsin had been impressed with Gen. Chechevov when he met him last April and that the 51-year-old general had been on the short list of candidates to become defence minister before Gen. Rodionov was appointed last July.

Mr. Yeltsin told Gen. Rodionov Wednesday to stop "whining" after the minister said he was in charge of "a disintegrating army and a dying navy" and stepped up calls for more defence spending.

But the 60-year-old minister's dismissal is no foregone conclusion. Mr. Yeltsin appeared to back him last week and risks more upheaval in the armed forces if he replaces him.

The parlous state of the armed forces is expected to feature in a radio address that Mr. Yeltsin will make to the nation, his second since recovering from a bout of pneumonia, Ekho Moskvy radio said.

It added that the address, to be broadcast at 0800 GMT, would also touch on the 1997 budget, which Mr. Yeltsin signed into law Wednesday after months of parliamentary wrangling.

The prime aim of the impending cabinet reshuffle appears to be for Mr. Yeltsin to show he is firmly back at the helm after spending many months out of the Kremlin with health problems.

Mr. Yeltsin has said he is particularly worried about delays in the payment of wages and pensions that has triggered strikes and protests across the vast country.

Underlining the level of social discontent, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions said Thursday it would stage a one-day national strike on March 27 to protest against wage arrears and the government's social policies.

Albania's Berisha to seek new mandate on March 3

TIRANA (R) — Albania's parliament has announced it would hold a vote to elect the country's president Monday and the ruling Democratic Party chose President Sali Berisha as its candidate.

Mr. Berisha, who had to stand for reelection by March 9, was likely to be unopposed in the vote and was sure to secure a second five-year term as his Democrats hold 122 of the 140 parliamentary seats.

"On Monday at 10 a.m. (0900 GMT), a plenary session of parliament will be convened to elect the president of the republic," parliamentary president Pjeter Arbori said.

Parliament set the date after a four-hour debate on three weeks of anti-government protests in the southern town of Vlore sparked by the collapse of Pyramid investment schemes that has left thousands of impoverished Albanians penniless.

Before the debate, deputies stood for a minute's

silence for the victims of a violent clash in Vlore on Feb. 10. One man was shot dead and two others died of heart attacks.

"Vlore University students, who began a hunger strike eight days ago, have become a fresh focus of anti-government resentment."

In Gjirokastra, 230 kilometres south of Tirana, police units surrounded a university building where 46 students began a hunger strike Thursday in solidarity with Vlore students.

Regular police later withdrew but plainclothes police remained in the area and had ordered the students to vacate the building on the grounds that their action was illegal.

The right-wing government has tried repeatedly to halt peaceful protests by describing their actions as illegal.

The Gjirokastra students, who were addressed by Berisha in the town Wednesday, said they were unimpressed with his refusal to

sack the government over the financial scandal.

Some 600 students who have occupied a nearby lecture hall were later joined by 300 other students.

In Tirana, police intervened Thursday to halt students in the capital from mounting their own hunger strike.

In Elbasan, 50 kilometres south of Tirana, 2,000 people Thursday staged a peaceful anti-government rally and later dispersed. Albania's state news agency ATA reported.

The symbolism of the student action has not been lost on Berisha or the Democrats. Student protests led to the downfall of 45 years of Stalinist rule in 1990 and students helped found the Democratic Party in December of that year.

Azem Hajdari, a student leader of that anti-Communist revolt, who is now a Democrat deputy, called in parliament for the resignation of Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi's government

over its handling of the Pyramid scheme scams.

"The government should resign because some 80 to 90 per cent of the Democrats want such a thing," he told the assembly.

Twelve other Democrats and two other senior party figures have also called for the dismissal of the Meksi administration.

But Mr. Meksi remained defiant. "What is currently happening in Vlore is out of character of the Vlore people, but it should be solved before it is too late," he told deputies.

Despite government opposition within the Democrats, Mr. Berisha was certain to win enough votes Monday as smaller rightist parties in parliament have declined to mount a challenge.

Berisha's main political rival, Socialist leader Fatos Nano, is in jail for corruption but his supporters allege he is being held as a political prisoner.

U.N. renews Angola peace force for only a month

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The Security Council, blaming former UNITA rebels for delays in establishing a national unity government in Angola, has extended the mandate of the U.N. peace-keeping force there for only one month, until March 31.

The move will enable the Council to keep the situation under close scrutiny.

In a unanimous resolution the Council also said it was ready, in case of further delay, to impose trade sanctions on UNITA and travel restrictions on its senior officials.

The U.N. Angola Verifica-

tion Mission (UNAVEM III), now numbering about 6,600 troops, observers and police, has been helping oversee a peace accord which the government led by President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos signed with UNITA in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1994.

Establishment of a national unity government, originally scheduled for Jan. 25, was to mark the culmination of the peace process.

But this was postponed, largely because of problems in finding an acceptable role for UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, who still controls

much of Angola, including diamond-rich areas.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a recent report he would recommend a two-month extension of the U.N. force if the national unity government were formed before the expiry of UNAVEM's current mandate at the end of February.

Otherwise, he recommended only a one-month renewal, until the end of March.

Even after UNAVEM ends its mandate and completes its withdrawal over several months, it is expected to be succeeded by a smaller U.N. observer mis-

sion that would remain until the end of the year.

The Security Council resolution expressed deep concern at the second delay in forming a national unity government "as a result of the failure of UNITA" to meet an agreed timetable.

It also expressed concern at the continued delay in carrying out remaining political and military provisions of the peace accord, including the selection and incorporation of some UNITA soldiers into the Angolan armed forces and the demobilisation of the others.

Major 'disappointed' by Tory by-election defeat

LONDON (AFP) — Prime Minister John Major said Friday he was "disappointed" by his party's drubbing in a by-election that had been viewed as a barometer of national mood for upcoming general elections.

The loss of a seat in Thursday's voting put Mr. Major's government back in a minority of one in the House of Commons, accentuating the frailty of his government's parliamentary position.

But he insisted the opposition Labour victory in the northeastern constituency of

Wirral South near Liverpool would "not affect people's lives," and he predicted his party would win the general elections he has promised to call by May 1.

Labour deputy leader John Prescott called the result "amazing and brilliant... a major shift in politics," but he insisted Labour, which is leading the Tories in all polls on the elections, was not "complacent."

The Tories got the "kicking" Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine had predicted in Wirral South, with Labour's

candidate, 56-year-old former civil servant Ben Chapman, garnering a 7,888-vote margin over Tory rival Les Byrom in the Conservative stronghold.

"Of course I'm disappointed by the result," said Mr. Major. "It's a poor reward for an excellent candidate. But last night's result won't affect people's lives."

The by-election, he said, was "the end of the phoney war."

"Next time, a cross in the wrong box could mean Britain takes a wrong turning. I don't believe that at the

general election, people will want to elect a party that will increase spending, bring in higher taxes and higher interest rates, new trade union rights and an end to choice in education."

"That's what will happen if they vote in a Labour government."

Tony Blair, who in nearly three years as Labour leader has orchestrated wholesale reform in the party said in remarks prepared for a speech later in the day: "We have changed for the better, and they have changed for the worse."



Laure Lamotte (left) mourns near caskets of Isabelle and Audrey as their father weeps (centre) during graveside ceremonies Thursday. France mourned four school girls who were raped and slain during carnival celebrations (Reuter photo)

Murdered girls' funeral draws 7,000 in France

BDULGNE-SUR-MER, France (R) — French Prime Minister Alain Juppe joined 7,000 mourners Thursday at the funeral of four girls raped and murdered last week in a crime that sparked calls for the return of the Guillotine.

The ceremony took place in the cathedral of the Channel port of Boulogne-sur-Mer as the National Assembly in Paris suspended its session for 10 minutes to honour the victims.

Peggy, 20, her 17-year-old sister Amelie, Isabelle, 20, and her sister Audrey, 17, went missing on the night of Feb. 11 during carnival celebrations. Their costumed bodies were found days later hastily buried in the sand near a World War II concrete bunker.

Two scrap metal dealer brothers, one a convicted murderer and the other a convicted rapist, are in custody on suspicion of raping and strangling the girls.

"They were always smiling and gay. They always had a kind word. We are shocked by this tragic event. We pray for them and their families," Delphine, a friend of the victims, said during the sombre funeral service.

In the wake of a series of sex killings and Belgium's child murder scandal, the government has proposed a bill to toughen punishment of sex offenders and introduce medical tracking of rapists after their release from prison.

The killings also led to calls for a reintroduction of the death penalty. The Guillotine was abolished in 1981.

Over the objections of the dead girls' families, officials of the far-right National Front party called a news conference to urge a return of the death penalty.

"It is up to the priests to speak of the dead and up to the politicians to defend the living," said National Front leader Carl Lang.

Pakistan quakes kills at least 48

QUETTA, Pakistan (AFP) — A major earthquake measuring up to 7.3 on the Richter Scale killed at least 48 people in southwestern Pakistan Friday, officials said.

Thousands of panic-stricken residents poured onto the streets of Quetta, capital of Baluchistan province, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, after a main tremor at 2:10 a.m. (2110 GMT Thursday).

Thirty-eight people were killed in Harnai, 145 kilometres east of Quetta, provincial government officials said. Three villages were destroyed around Harnai and a rail line was cut.

Three people were killed in Quetta, and seven in Sibbi, a district about 160 kilometres to the east, hospital sources and residents said. Sibbi and Harnai were the closest towns to the quake epicentre in the Sulaiman Mountains.

Officials highlighted though that the toll could rise as reports to come in from across the far flung province with a population of around six million.

Pakistan's Seismological Centre in Pesbawar estimated the main quake's magnitude at 6.6 on the open-ended Richter Scale.

Monitoring stations in Australia and Hong Kong gave an estimate of 7.3 on the Richter Scale. A quake of seven can cause major damage.

The Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO) in Canberra also measured an earlier quake which it said hit 6.3 on the Richter Scale.

Panic was biggest in Quetta, which was razed by a quake 62 years ago that killed an estimated 35,000 people. Nineteen earthquakes have hit the city since 1905, according to local experts.

The first impact was followed by a series of aftershocks which rattled the city of one million people.

Many mud-and-stone homes on the outskirts of Quetta caved in, resulting in at least two deaths.

U.S. refuses visa to Sinn Fein leader

LONDON (AFP) — The United States has refused to grant a visa to Gerry Adams, the leader of the IRA's Sinn Fein political wing, a press report said Friday.

The Financial Times (FT) quoted an unnamed U.S. official as saying "we told Mr. Adams a year ago the only reason we would allow him into the country was to hear face-to-face how disappointed the administration was at the resumption of (IRA) violence."

The official was referring to the violent campaign by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) for a united Ireland which the organisation renewed a year ago after a 17-month ceasefire.

The FT said the U.S. has invited the leaders of Northern Ireland's other main parties to a White House reception to celebrate Ireland's national holiday, Saint Patrick's Day, on March 17.

And in marked contrast to its position on Sinn Fein, the leaders of political parties representing Protestant paramilitaries had also been invited to the reception, the paper added.

The loyalists have held the ceasefires they called shortly after the IRA did so in September 1994, despite repeatedly threatening to end them in response to each attack by the IRA.

In 1995, seven months into the IRA ceasefire, Mr. Adams was feted when he attended the Saint Patrick's Day reception at the White House.

On Thursday, the IRA claimed responsibility for the death of a British soldier shot in the back by a sniper at a checkpoint in Northern Ireland earlier this month.

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Former king arrives in Bucharest

BUCHAREST (AFP) — "Long live King Michael," several people shouted, brandishing Romania's national colours red, yellow and blue and portraits of the former monarch.

The 75-year-old ex-king, who lives in exile in Switzerland, was forced to abdicate in 1947, then stripped of citizenship by the Communists in 1948, but the current centre-right government restored it on Feb. 21.

In 50 years, he has only once received authorisation to visit his native country — for the Orthodox Easter in 1992, when he was given a hero's welcome.

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Reno says no need yet for special Clinton funds probe

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno said Thursday that she so far sees no reason for an independent counsel to investigate the Democratic fund-raising controversy involving President Bill Clinton.

But Ms. Reno, who has ordered a Justice Department task force to vigorously investigate all allegations of improper fund-raising, said she would seek an outside special counsel should it become necessary under the law.

"As recently as last week, they (Justice Department lawyers) have advised me that it (the evidence in the fund-raising row) does not rise to the standards provided for in the independent counsel statute," she told reporters.

"When it does, I will follow the law of the statute. I'm prepared whenever that statute is triggered to use it."

Ms. Reno's statement drew an angry response from Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican who

is spearheading a drive to reform campaign finance laws. Mr. McCain said he was amazed by Ms. Reno's refusal to name an independent counsel to investigate fundraising after counsels had been appointed to look into other various allegations he considered far less serious.

"The quality of evidence of criminal wrongdoing may be in dispute," Mr. McCain said in a statement. "But the fact that abundant information has come to light about possible violations of the law by senior officials is not."

There has been a chorus of calls in Congress from Republicans and even some Democrats for Ms. Reno, a member of Democrat Clinton's cabinet, to seek an independent counsel to take over the Justice Department's criminal investigation of the fund-raising controversy dogging the president.

The controversy escalated this week when Mr. Clinton's staff released documents showing he took an

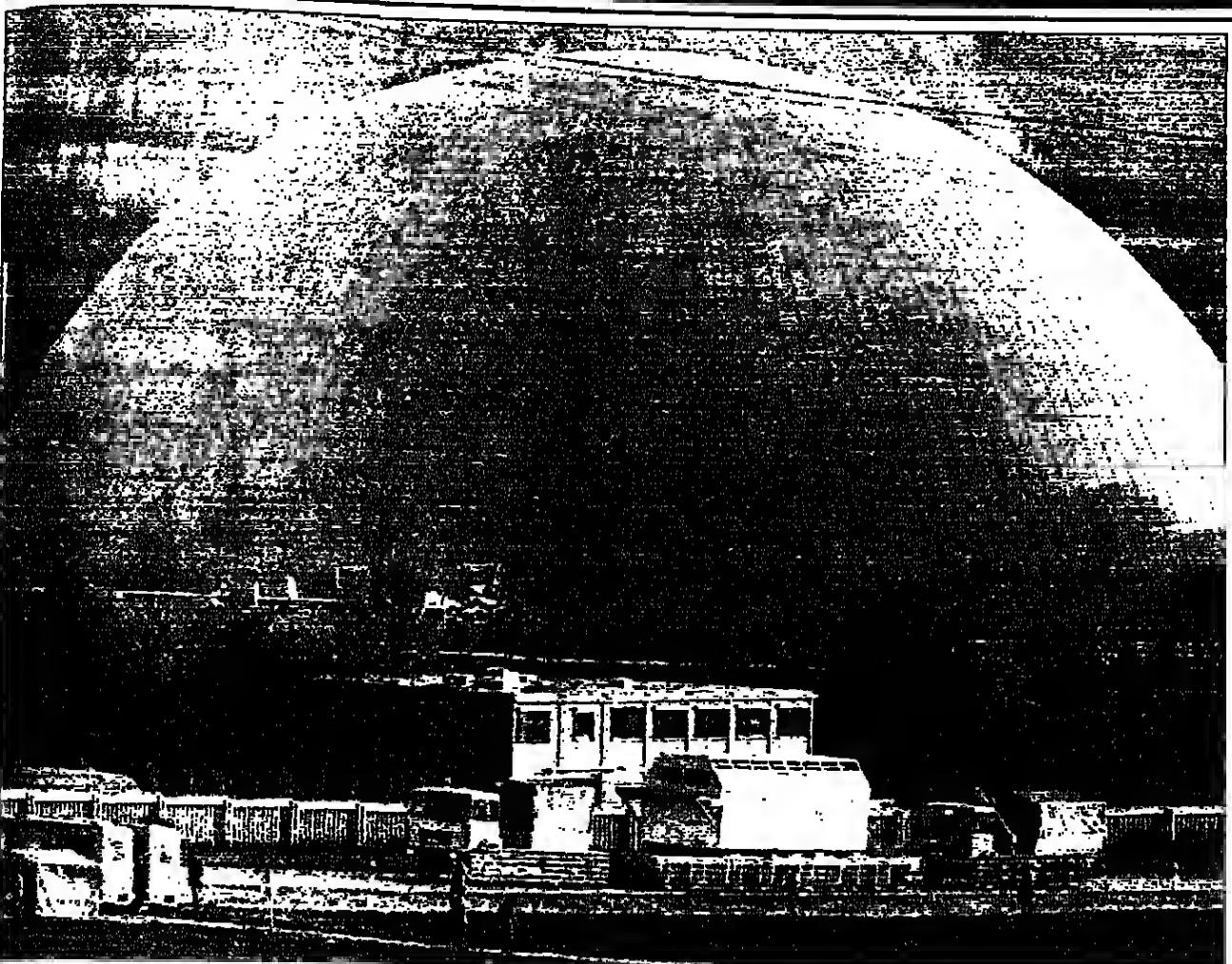
active role in wooing political supporters in the 1996 election campaign, inviting top contributors to overnight stays at the White House.

"I have spoken with the person heading the investigation for the (Justice Department's) criminal division as early as this morning, and I will continue to keep in close touch with him as we review all documents," Ms. Reno said, adding she has not received any recommendation from him for an outside counsel.

Mr. Clinton, who insists the White House invitations were proper and within the law, suggested on Wednesday that there was no reason for an independent counsel in the fund-raising controversy because there was no "legal issue" involved.

For her part, Ms. Reno said the law required "specific and credible evidence" that a crime had been committed by a high government official.

She made clear she and her task force prosecutors did not think the evidence yet met the threshold.



A truck with nuclear waste drives past the nuclear power station of Neckarwestheim near Stuttgart as it starts its controversial shipment under heavy guard of German riot police from the power plant to a Northern German dump Friday. Several anti-nuclear activists were arrested as they tried to stop the convoy (Reuter photo)

Bonn condemns violence in anti-nuclear protest

BONN (R) — German Interior Minister Manfred Kanther has said he would not shrink from a test of strength if it was forced on him by anti-nuclear activists opposing a shipment of nuclear waste.

Mr. Kanther said supporters of the anti-nuclear movement, including key members of opposition parties, knew they were indirectly provoking violence by calling for resistance.

"The government will not be brought to its knees by violence," Mr. Kanther told parliament in a debate. "The government wants no test of strength between perpetrators of violence and the state, but we will not shy away if it comes to that."

Opposition politicians said Mr. Kanther was ignoring the concerns of ordinary people opposed to nuclear waste transport and committed to peaceful demonstrations.

"A clever state does not charge head-first through every wall that is put up

before it," said Gerhard Glogowski, Social Democrat Interior Minister of Lower Saxony, where the controversial Gorleben nuclear waste depot is located.

"This shipment must be the last," he said.

After the debate, a narrow majority of parliament members voted to condemn acts of violence in connection with the shipment and take necessary measures against perpetrators.

The motion, supported by 324 members, with 75 against and 231 abstaining, said violent groups could not be allowed to abuse the right to peaceful protest.

Protests have heated up ahead of a shipment of nuclear waste due to arrive early next week at the medium-term storage site at Gorleben, east of Hanover.

Suspected anti-nuclear activists caused chaos on roads and railways in north Germany Thursday, setting fire to signal boxes and setting traffic lights permanently on red.

In recent weeks, suspected activists have sabotaged rail lines, smashed windows of public buildings in Hamburg and daubed walls with anti-nuclear slogans.

In a sign of widespread local opposition, hundreds of children have occupied school halls to stop them being used to house police drafted in to guard the shipment.

Mr. Glogowski said 30,000 police and border guards would be needed to protect the shipment, making it the biggest security operation in German peacetime history. He said the operation would cost his state over 66 million marks (\$39 million).

Last year more than 19,000 security officers clashed with some 8,000 demonstrators trying to block a Gorleben shipment.

Anti-nuclear groups are expecting some 20,000 protesters this time, although police say that number is exaggerated.

The head of the German

police union, Hermann Lutz, appealed to demonstrators not to sacrifice police safety for their ideals. "Some of these people think the police are not human," Mr. Lutz told German television.

Joschka Fischer, parliamentary spokesman of the opposition Greens, said the government was pushing through its nuclear energy policies like a "police state."

Ms. Fischer said Mr. Kanther's tough stance was an attempt to attract right-wing voters to the ruling Christian Democrats (CDU) in Sunday's local election in the state of Hesse.

The latest delivery will include two rail containers from France and four more from German power plants, being moved together to save costs for the required security operation.

The convoy is due to be assembled near the Neckarwestheim power plant in south-west Germany Friday and set off for Gorleben Monday.

Zaire rebels are set for talks but government holds back

PRETORIA (R) — Zairean rebels have said they are ready to begin talks on ending the country's civil war but a Kinshasa government official said his side is not authorised to start negotiations.

Bizima Karaha, foreign affairs spokesman for rebel leader Laurent Kabila, told BBC Radio he believed the government had a mandate to begin talks in South Africa.

"There are representatives from the government and the president's office here and I think for the first time these people will have a full mandate to start serious negotiations," he said.

Mr. Kabila and a small rebel delegation arrived in South Africa Tuesday as part of attempts by the South African government to get the two warring sides together for face-to-face talks.

Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko is represented in South Africa by his nephew and security adviser Honore Nbanda Nzambo Ko Ayumba, who held talks with President Nelson Mandela earlier Thursday.

Asked if the rebel delega-

tion had met Mr. Nbanda, Mr. Karaha said: "No, we haven't because we believe that until such time there is an agenda on which we could meet and talk about there is no reason why we should meet."

"We don't have conditions for talks, all that we want is peace. Our movement is fighting for a united democratic, prosperous country where human rights can be respected, including the rights of all the minority."

But in France, where Mr. Mobutu is recovering from prostate cancer surgery and radiation treatments carried out in Switzerland last year, the president's spokesman said Mr. Nbanda was not authorised to speak on behalf of the government.

"He has no authority to do that kind of thing," the spokesman told Reuters. "He is in South Africa for personal reasons. He was in no way sent there to negotiate."

The spokesman insisted Mr. Mobutu would not agree to negotiations until all foreign soldiers had withdrawn from Zairean soil.

Zaire has accused Uganda and Tutsi-led Rwanda and

Burundi of supporting the rebels, many of whom are ethnic Tutsis. But Zaire's three eastern neighbours have denied involvement in the war, which began last October when the rebels took up arms.

In the Zairean capital Kinshasa, the government accused Mr. Kabila of being a puppet but said it was open to the idea of a regional conference in March, provided all foreign troops left the area.

African foreign ministers agreed in Tripoli Thursday that Togo should host an emergency summit on Zaire on March 18 and 19. Mr. Mandela has said he will meet Mr. Mobutu at the same time.

"We do not understand how the United States can be pushing us to negotiate with Kabila after recognising that Zaire has been the victim of foreign aggression," Pascale Dema, Zairean Prime Minister Kengo Wa Dondo's spokesman, told Reuters.

"We consider him a puppet," he said, referring to Mr. Kabila, who had talks with Mr. Mandela Wednesday.

"We are, however, open to the idea of a regional conference provided that the U.N. resolutions of Feb. 19 calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops are applied," Mr. Dema said.

The rebel delegation in Pretoria has held talks with George Moose, U.S. assistant secretary of state for African development.

In Paris, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan said after talks with French Prime Minister Alain Juppe Thursday that he was optimistic about the prospects for a negotiated settlement of a rebel uprising in eastern Zaire.

"I hope that the discussions in South Africa are going to lead to something...I believe we are on the right path," Mr. Annan told reporters after meeting Mr. Juppe.

Special U.N. envoy Mohammed Sahnoun, who was in South Africa for the diplomatic initiative on Zaire launched by President Mandela, was expected in Paris Saturday to brief the United Nations chief. Mr. Annan said.

S. Korean intelligence official, top aides sacked

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korean President Kim Young-Sam Friday sacked four influential officials of his secretariat and one senior intelligence officer in a cleanup of his government, tainted by a damaging loans scandal.

Kim Ki-Sup, a vice director of the country's main intelligence agency, the National Security Planning Agency (NSPA), was sacked, an NSPA spokesman said.

The spokesman declined to elaborate on the reasons, but press reports said the intelligence official had been suspected of illegally relaying "high level" information to Kim Hyun-Chul, the president's second son.

Opposition parties have linked the intelligence officer to the stormy loans-for-kickbacks scandal, which has already toppled a cabinet minister, four MPs and three top bankers.

The president's son has been officially cleared by prosecutors of "wrongdoing" in the case, which erupted on Jan. 23 when the flagship firms of Hanbo, the country's 14th largest conglomerate, collapsed under \$5.8 billion of unpaid debt.

But opposition parties insisted the son face parliament in account for his alleged corruption. The opposition contends he played a leading role in pressuring banks to provide billions of dollars in loans to the debt-ridden group.

The intelligence official's dismissal followed a reshuffle of the 13-man presidential secretariat earlier Friday, prompted by the president's apology Tuesday for the involvement of his confidants and son in the scandal.

"I apologise for failing to serve the president," said Kim Kwang-II, sacked chief of the presidential secretariat. He was replaced by former home minister and ruling party MP Kim Yong-Tae.

The three other outgoing aides also blamed themselves for causing the three-month-long crisis prompted by labor agitation in December and the ensuing Hanbo scandal.

"I should take full responsibility," said Lee Suk-Chae, the president's economic pointman, who was replaced by Kim In-Ho, chairman of the Fair Trade Commission.

Former MP Kang In-Sup took the post of Senior Secretary of Political Affairs and Ryu Jae-Ho, head of the Supply Administration, became Senior Secretary for General Affairs.

Afghanistan's Taliban assures Western donors no harm done to French prisoners

KABUL (AFP) — A Taliban spokesman has assured the Western aid community in Kabul that no harm will come to two French men arrested a week ago on charges of violating Islamic Law, sources here told AFP Friday.

"The Foreign Ministry will do its best that these two people come out of court with their honour and dignity intact," Acting Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai was quoted as saying.

"ACF is a small case, not that big an issue," Mr. Stanekzai said of the incident during a meeting with Western aid officials.

The two French men, Frederic Michel and Jose Daniel Llorente, who work for the aid agency Action Contre La Faim (ACF), were arrested last Saturday by the Taliban during a lunch attended by 60 Afghan women.

Among the six violations of Shariah, or Islamic Law, the two are being investigated for was cavorting with "half-naked" Afghan women, a charge which the Western community in Kabul categorically rejects.

However, according to the Taliban the two men were guilty of violations just by being in the same compound as the Afghan women.

"According to the rules and regulations, we had to arrest them," Mr. Stanekzai told the Western aid representatives.

"They are in good condition and not mis-handled."

Mr. Stanekzai went on to say the Taliban were not going to suspend or stop the ACF programme in Kabul, which is responsible for the supplementary feeding of malnourished Afghan children.

The 1997 ACF programme is being funded by the European Community, to a sum of \$520,000, in which more was to have been allocated, aid experts said.

However, the international community, including the United Nations, have expressed much concern over the arrest of the two French aid workers and have debated cutting humanitarian assistance if the two prisoners are not released unharmed.

Mr. Stanekzai expressed his appreciation for the Western aid community presence in Kabul and asked that they increase their humanitarian assistance to needy Afghans.

"We request that they increase their assistance and not decrease, as the people of Af-

ghanistan are badly in need," the deputy foreign minister said.

"We are grateful for the organisations helping the people of Afghanistan."

The Taliban, who seized Kabul on Sept. 27, 1996, have attracted much international interest due to their strenuously interpreted and enforced application of Islamic Law, particularly concerning women.

In addition to the two men arrested last week, five Afghan ACF employees — drivers, cooks and watchmen — were also taken away by the Taliban.

None of the 60 Afghan women present at the ACF lunch have reportedly been arrested by the Taliban, although the attorney-general told AFP this week they must be investigated.

These women — doctors and nurses — are actually employees of the Ministry of Public Health, "who are paid an incentive" by ACF to run clinics, a Western aid representative said.

Meanwhile, the Taliban militia Thursday accused Russia of scheming to preserve their influence in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

"Russia has told (the Central Asian) states that the Taliban is a danger to them so they would ask for Russian help and a Russian military presence in their countries," Information Minister Amir Khan Mutaqi told Reuters Thursday.

"We have declared in the past to the Central Asian republics, and we wish to repeat, that we have no intention of interfering in the affairs of any other country," he added.

Mr. Mutaqi was responding to reports of a meeting Wednesday between the defence ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the Uzbek capital Tashkent.

According to a report by the Interfax News Agency, the ministers agreed on a coordinated reaction if the Taliban moved close to the border that Afghanistan shares with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

"Interfax learnt from a competent source that that meeting had worked out concrete and coordinated actions which would serve as an adequate reaction to the possibility of the military units of the Taliban moving close to the southern borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)," said the report.

China's parliament hints at political reforms

BEIJING (AFP) — China's parliament hinted at a thaw following the death of Deng Xiaoping by calling Friday for political reform to match the nation's striking economic reforms.

"Deng Xiaoping was the chief architect of China's socialist reform. An important component of his theory ... is that while developing our economy, vigorous efforts should also be made to restructure China's political structure," parliament spokesman Zhou Jie said.

"Deng repeatedly mentioned reform on political system in the third volume of his selected works," he told a media briefing ahead of the Saturday opening of the National People's Congress (NPC).

Mr. Deng, who died on Feb. 19, is normally credited in Communist Party circles with maintaining the absolute control of the party while pushing economic reforms.

But his death has opened up the current leadership to a battle for supremacy and many analysts predict that a change in direction — under the cover of "developing" Mr. Deng's policies — is possible. Mr. Zhou did not indicate clearly the direction of the NPC's post-Deng political reforms, but said they would not lead to "a copy of the parliamentary system or the multi-party system that is practised in the West."

However, he did confirm a foreign ministry statement Thursday that China was considering signing the U.N. covenant on civil and political rights and the U.N. covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, which would force the nation of 1.2 billion people towards a more tolerant political system.

The NPC has long been regarded as a rubber-stamp body as it meets for only two weeks a year and approves almost every motion put before it.

But under the stewardship of its current Chairman Qiao Shi, the parliament has started to develop some teeth, by sending out its own teams to inspect the work of the gov-

ernment and forcing amendments to a number of laws needing its approval. Western human rights watchdogs have also begun to lobby the legislative body.

"Deng Xiaoping's passing and the beginning of a new political era is an opportunity to make the National People's Congress session a turning point for China's legal system," the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch Asia and Human Rights in China said in a fax received in Beijing.

They were joined by London-based Amnesty International which called for the NPC to start the post-Deng age by using its legislative power to stop criminal law being "used as a tool against dissent and being arbitrarily implemented."

All three groups urged the legislative body to carefully review a draft proposal before them to eliminate the statutes on "counter-revolution," from China criminal law.

They expressed fears that such an elimination would not protect freedom of speech or belief as it would simply be replaced by "state security" offences.

"While some other legal reforms that the NPC is expected to enact may represent genuine advances in criminal justice, the removal of 'counter-revolution' statutes does not appear to be one of them," they said.

Families of dissidents detained by the Chinese government also expressed little hope of real change with the removal of 'counter-revolution'.

Relatives of Wei Jingsheng, the "father of China's democracy movement" and Chen Ziming, a political researcher who is currently on medical parole, said they had no plans to petition the NPC. Ding Zilin, the philosophy professor whose son was killed in the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy demonstrations, said she had already told the NPC all she had to say.

"I don't want to write a letter this time as I have already written all I have to say, and anyway there are a lot of other matters to be covered in this session of the NPC," she said.

Conference lays ground to end child labour scourge

AMSTERDAM (R) — Delegates at an international conference on child labour voiced cautious optimism Thursday that the battle against the exploitation of the world's 250 million child workers was being won.

"It may be controversial to say it, but I think it can be stated that the battle against child labour is being won," said Assefa Bekele, director of the working conditions department of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Ms. Bekele was speaking on the final day of the Amsterdam Child Labour Conference, which has focused on the most intolerable types of child labour —

slavery, forced labour and the use of children in prostitution, pornography and drug trafficking.

The 200 government ministers, union leaders and working childrens representatives at the conference started technical workshops on key areas in the debate over child exploitation.

Under discussion were improving international and regional cooperation, the relationship between globalisation and economic liberalisation and child labour, and a proposed new ILO convention to ban the worst forms of exploitation by 1999.

The two-day conference has called for an immediate end to such practices and it

hopes the discussions will start to lay the groundwork for a worldwide ban.

A follow-up conference will be held in Oslo in October to draft an international commitment to eradicate all child work.

Delegates have said this may now be possible because of a sea-change in attitudes to the problem throughout the world.

"Those of us who remember what the situation was like a decade ago, remember a few individual voices crying in the wilderness," Ms. Bekele said. "But now the issue has jumped to the top of the international agenda."

Developing nations, where most child labour is concentrated, have long

been suspicious of Western interference in the area of workers' rights, fearing this will undermine their main comparative advantage in world trade — cheap labour.

Indian Labour Minister M. Arunachalam said Wednesday that the West needed to understand the plight of poverty-stricken families.

"Parents send children away to work instead of sending them to school not because they want it, but because there is no option or alternative for their biological survival," he said.

Ms. Bekele said a broad-based movement against exploitation had now grown up, including many governments, corporations, interest groups and individuals.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation
Established 1975

الصحف الأردنية المستقلة المنشورة بالإنجليزية من مؤسسة الصحافة الأردنية

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Need is for united front

THE TALKS in Washington which the Jordanian, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders will hold this month with President Bill Clinton are going to be very crucial, coming as they do on the heels of the Israeli government's decision to build a new settlement in East Jerusalem. The separate talks assume an added significance, in fact, as they also come before the Palestinians and Israelis start their negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories, Jerusalem, settlements and refugees.

The Israeli position on all of these issues is probably clearer today than it has ever been, in that the Netanyahu government wants to meet the Palestinians' minimum demands and give the Syrians literally nothing in return for peace. True, the Likud and Labour parties have come out with a joint paper on what Israel's bottom line should be in the final status talks, but the truth is that the right-wing coalition governing Israel would give up very little to the Arabs unless it comes under tremendous pressure to comply with U.N. resolutions and international law.

The Arabs, for their part, have repeatedly made it clear that Israel has to withdraw from all the occupied territories — including Jerusalem, South Lebanon and the Golan Heights — before real and lasting peace can be reached in the Middle East.

While His Majesty the King, President Hosni Mubarak and President Yasser Arafat are expected to reiterate this Arab position to the U.S. president, there is no doubt that his administration will want to compartmentalise relations between each of the three Arab countries, on the one hand, and the U.S. and Israel on the other. While this would be only normal for the Americans to do, it would be more effective for the Arab side to present a united front. Bilateral ties are necessarily different in nature and scope, it is true. But they are largely a function of the peace process, on whose goals and parameters the Arabs unanimously agreed last June.

At the moment there exists a degree of uneasiness among the Arab parties themselves, a recurrent problem against which this country has long fought. Political coordination, especially at this crucial juncture, is what it takes to enable the Arab voice to be heard, whether by the Americans or the Israelis, Jordan believes. For us there is no question of stealing the show from anybody, and certainly not of having designs against anyone. The issue has been and will continue to be whether the Arab World can heal its wounds, save what can be saved from its usurped rights and ensure a better future for our children and ourselves.

Jordanians do not begrudge Egypt for wanting to balance its act between its peace partner, Israel, and its Arab ally, Syria, or for trying to wrest for the Palestinians all their rights from the Israelis. The same goes for the Palestinians: they know we are behind them, hearts and souls, all the way. We thus fail to understand why some people in Egypt and Palestine have to resort to doubts and suspicions every time Jordan pronounces itself on, and acts to salvage the peace process. What Jordan wants to be achieved is a fair, comprehensive and lasting settlement that at the end of the day will not endanger this country and its people.

Meanwhile, what Jordan, Egypt and Palestine should do before the Washington talks is to come up with a joint strategy for dealing with Israel and a joint message to convey to their American interlocutors. This is a critical stage in the peace process that requires a unified, not fragmented, Arab stand.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i daily discussed Israel's decision to go ahead with plans to build a new settlement in the Arab lands, close to Jerusalem, and said in view of the Israeli government's plans, the Arabs are dutybound to freeze their relations with the Jewish state until it responds to the requirements of a lasting and just peace. Samir Habashneh, who is also a member of the Lower House of Parliament, said that it is only logical to suspend all contacts between the Arabs and the Israelis until the Israeli leaders honour the agreements with the Palestinians and refrain from actions that would breed violence in the region. The present Likud-led government has refused to open peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon on the principle of exchanging land for peace, refused to enter into final status negotiations with the Palestinians, rejected Palestinian people's rights to an independent state in Palestine and refused to withdraw troops from the occupied Palestinian territory, said the writer. To crown all these hostile stands, the Israelis have now embarked on building yet another Jewish settlement close to Arab Jerusalem. In total disregard to the principles laid down in the Madrid peace conference and in violation of all U.N. resolutions, he added. The writer said since the Arabs are left with no peace process, they must logically suspend their contacts, the normalisation process and other links with the Jewish state.

Jordanian Perspective

Har Homa settlement shatters hopes for security and stability in the region

By Dr. Musa Kellani

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been giving us the impression that he was under strong political pressure from his coalition allies to go ahead and approve the building of a Jewish settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim since the affair broke last month. One tended to give him a little benefit of the doubt, given that Jewish settlements or no settlements, Netanyahu was first and foremost a politician and had to act accordingly to ensure his survival. But today it has become clear that neither is he a good politician nor is he assured of his political survival. His declaration of "victory" in the tug-of-war over the very Israeli policy of Judaising the occupied Palestinian territories, including Arab East Jerusalem, has torn down the thin political veil he used to adopt while dealing with Jordan and other friendly countries. If anything, one should see him as more detrimental to Palestinian and Arab interests than some of the most known hawks in Israel like Ariel Sharon and Rafael Eitan. At least Sharon and Eitan speak their real mind and make no secret of their ambitions to turn the Palestinian territories into integral parts of the state of Israel under whatever conditions. While Netanyahu speaks eloquently of peace with the Palestinians and Arabs but acts directly in contradiction to the very essentials of that peace.

If we ever deal with Sharon, Eitan and their likes, we at least know where we stand and where they stand and we can adopt our positions accordingly. But with Netanyahu, we never know where we stand in terms of his promises

and his actual actions because, quite simply, he says something and does something else.

From what we understand of the talks the Israeli prime minister held here last Sunday, he hinted that he had no choice but to go ahead give the green signal for the project on Jabal Abu Ghneim but had no intention to actually build the settlement and repeatedly promised to build housing for Palestinians, in parallel to those for Jews.

Apart from the stark contradiction of those two assertions, can we in Jordan be expected to be that naive to believe him? If he did expect Jordan to swallow his arguments, then it only shows how politically immature the Israeli prime minister is.

The net outcome of his move to approve the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement is a serious blow to the Middle East peace process and a deep sense of gloom for all those in the region, including us in Jordan, who had been hoping against hope that the Israeli-Palestinian track was back on the right course after the signing of the Hebron agreement in mid-January.

We have heard the international community condemnations of the Israeli plan to build the so-called Har Homa settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim. Suffice it to say that the move comes in blatant violation of the very essence of the Middle East peace process in whatever context, political, legal, religious or otherwise, and is a slap on the face of the hopes of the Arabs and the rest of the world to see security and stability in the region based on international

legitimacy and respect for the rights of all parties involved.

However, it is a foregone conclusion that we cannot expect the Europeans or the Americans to take an initiative to preempt Israeli actions that wreck the peace process. Europe or the U.S. might want to believe that the crisis over the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement is a passing hurdle and things would get back to normal in a few weeks. It only shows their shortcomings in understanding the high Arab and Muslim sensitivity over East Jerusalem as well as the growing conviction that the goal of a just and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement becomes as elusive as ever regardless of the progress made so far.

In any event, the initiative is squarely in the Arab court today, and hence the significance of the Jordanian parliament's call for an urgent Arab summit to discuss a unified Arab strategy to counter Israel's steady but sure moves to consolidate its grip on Arab East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories after giving the Palestinians token autonomy that simply serves the Jewish state's desire to ensure the "security" of Jews.

If the Arabs do not rise to the seriousness of the situation and set aside their internal differences to come together and forge a strong all-embracing strategy, then they will have no one but themselves to blame for the loss of Arab East Jerusalem and the continuing instability and strife in their region.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

New Israeli settlement 'challenging not only the Palestinians and the Arabs but the whole world'

REVIEWED BY
ELIA NASRALLAH

ISRAEL'S DECISION to build a new settlement in the neighbourhood of Arab Jerusalem dominated the local Arabic dailies last week. Domestic affairs and pan-Arab issues were also covered in the press.

Sultan Hattab, a writer for Al Ra'i daily, described Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to start building the new settlement as tantamount to the assassination of the peace process.

Mr. Netanyahu is once again starting up fires which can surely destroy the prospects of peace in this region and perpetuate the state of war between the Arabs and the Israelis, said the writer.

Mr. Netanyahu leaves the Palestinians with only one alternative: to resort to any form of resistance to occupation of Arab land, said the writer who urged the oppressed people to unify their ranks, remain steadfast and maintain their resistance which is supported by the whole world.

The Palestinians, he added, have the right to pursue the struggle for freedom and for protecting their lands and rights.

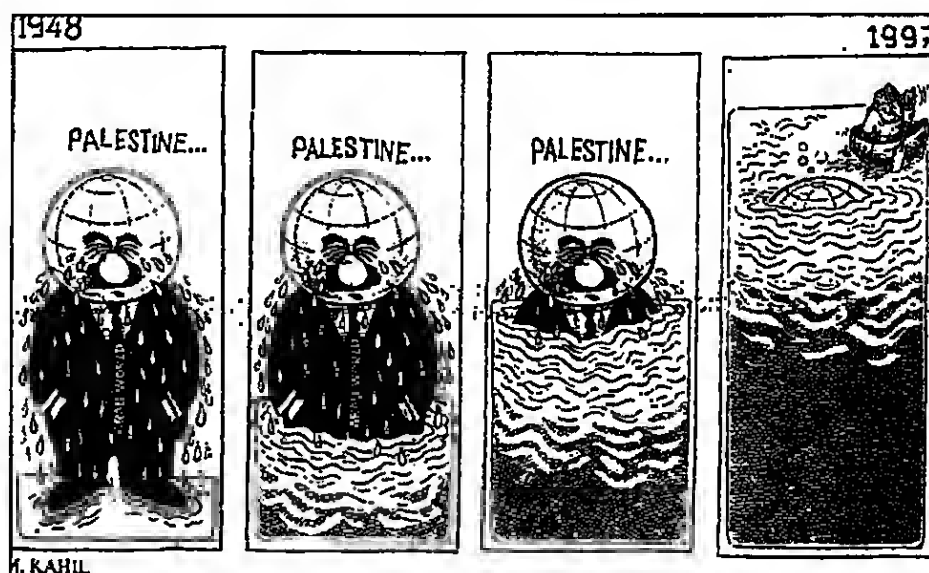
The battle for Jerusalem has started and it will be a long and violent conflict, aimed at liberating the Holy City from Israeli occupation, said Taher Adwan, a writer for Al Doustour.

By pursuing a Jewish settlement programme in Arab lands and by defying the will of the international community, the Israelis are once again displaying their desire to resort to force and anti-peace moves to achieve their goals and perpetuate their occupation of Arab lands, said the writer.

The writer stressed that in the long battle for Jerusalem, the Palestinians are backed by one billion Muslims around the world and they are bound to win the battle if they stand fast and maintain their struggle to regain their rights.

According to the writer, Netanyahu's decision to build the settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim represents Israel's reply to the worldwide campaign launched by the Palestinians and the Arab countries in the recent weeks against the Israeli intransigence and against the continued occupation, and Israel's refusal to implement the Oslo agreements.

He said with the construction of the Jewish set-



tlement, peace in the region becomes far beyond anyone's reach.

Writing under the title of "Netanyahu versus the world," a columnist who writes for Al Ra'i daily said that by declaring openly that Israel is embarking on the construction of the new settlement within the boundaries of Arab Jerusalem, Netanyahu is challenging not only the Palestinians and the Arabs but the whole world, as well as the U.N. Security Council that passed its resolutions 242 and 338 against the annexation of the Arab city.

Mohammad Kharoub said that after signing the Hebron accord with the Palestinians, Mr. Netanyahu felt free to manoeuvre in other areas and made tours in the U.S. and other countries to win further support for his government's actions, paving the ground for a decision to build the Jewish settlement close to Arab Jerusalem.

The writer noted however that by defying the world community and pursuing Jewish settlement programmes, Mr. Netanyahu will be facing the anger of the Palestinians and the Arab and Muslim nations and will once again bring about Israel's isolation.

A writer for Al Doustour called on the Arab countries to show solidarity with the Palestinians and to convene an emergency Arab summit meeting to chart a new strategy for confronting Israel's defiance and Jewish settlements programmes.

Yasser Zaareh said that Israel, backed by the U.S., is continually defying the Arab and Muslim feelings and it is incumbent on the Arabs and Muslims to rally their ranks and adopt a common strategy to deal with the situation at hand.

The writer said that the Arabs should beware of the fact that the U.S.-Israeli alliance has opened side battles in Sudan to divert the Arab World's attention from Palestine, has been active in launching campaigns against Damascus, has escalated Turkish-Israeli military cooperation and has threatened to bait American aid to Egypt in a bid to weaken the Arab states' position.

The writer said that in the face of this defiance, the Arabs have no alternative to consolidating their ranks and meeting at a summit level to deal with the situation.

Hamadeh Faraaneh, a writer for Al Doustour, said that Jerusalem should remain a city open to all religions and sovereignty over it should be shared by the Palestinians and the Israelis because this is the only feasible solution to the long Arab-Israeli conflict and the only way for ensuring security and stability in the entire region.

The writer said Jerusalem constitutes a red line which the Israelis must not cross because otherwise the region will be facing turmoil once again.

Israel, said the writer, has heard the Arab views during Netanyahu's recent visit to Amman and on many occasions of the Palestinians and other Arabs, but it is not heeding any calls nor is it listening to any advice.

The judaisation of the Arab city of Jerusalem, said the writer, constitutes a real danger to the city, and to the religious interests of the Muslims and Christians alike, and therefore concerted efforts on the part of the world community must be exerted to prevent the return of violence and conflict to this holy region.

Mohammad Daoud, a writer for Al Doustour, dis-

cussed a recent Arab Economic Council meeting in Cairo, stressing the need for Arab states to remove restrictions on trade and other barriers for the purpose of paving the ground for a common Arab market.

The writer said that without a pan-Arab and national awakening, all efforts by individual Arab states to achieve sustainable economic development will be futile.

He said the creation of world economic blocs and the rapid economic developments around the world make it imperative for the Arabs to pool their resources and remove all obstacles that stand in the way of creating an Arab economic bloc. The writer said that by forming such a bloc, the Arabs can withstand all cultural invasions and economic and political challenges.

A writer for Al Doustour launched a scathing attack on Turkey's army commander for visiting Israel and openly declaring a military alliance between Tel Aviv and Ankara.

This army commander went a step further during his visit to Israel by claiming that Turkey and Israel are the only democracies in the Middle East region, thus defying the feelings of all Arab states and winning the hostility of the Arab masses.

By such announcements and through close military cooperation with the Jewish state, Turkey is openly recognising Israel's occupation of the city of Jerusalem and parts of the Arab countries, said George Haddad.

The writer asked how Turkey could be a democracy when it is oppressing its minorities, something which prompted the Europeans to refuse Ankara's entry into the European Union.

LETTERS

Clean business needed

To the Editor:

I'M WRITING to you on my last day of stay in Jordan (Feb. 26). Since I am returning to Germany, I find it is my duty to write to all concerned with the business of tourism since I cordially love Jordan and its people and I hope to be able to do business here.

I am the marketing director of a leading tourist bureau in Köln, Germany, "Fridrick Stein Tours" is specialised in organising group tours to Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

The last has become the main targeted market due to the progress made in the peace process.

Since the area is very rich in ruins of ancient civilisations, we intended to enter Jordan into our programme in which 4,000 tourists from Germany, Austria and Italy will participate. We were hopeful that our clients will visit Jordan and enjoy its nice weather, ancient ruins and attractions of Petra, Jerash, Wadi Rum, Madaba and Aqaba.

So, we planned an integrated programme for these 4,000 customers in big successive tourist groups to visit the region, including Jordan. Our main aim was to persuade tourists to take part in this programme and they, in turn will have convinced friends and relatives all over Europe to join our programme in future.

Since our company believes that "to make a journey a true success and a pleasant experience to clients, do it yourself," I visited Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan to discover and see everything with my own eyes to spare our clients any disappointment.

Of course, there are many merits in doing tourist business in Jordan which really has valuable opportunities for profitable business. But the demerits are also to be told because they made me very anxious, hesitant and disappointed. For this painful truth, Jordan will not be included in our programme and so the 4,000 tourists will visit only Israel, Palestine and Egypt.

The unfavourable, even disastrous, situation is that things here seem to be upside-down. A tourist guide and a bus driver act as if they were the masters of the game. This behaviour or (policy) contradicts the abc of the business of service and its basic concepts and standards in Europe and the U.S.

Your tourist guides and drivers, a majority of them, rule the tourists. They impose on them a drastic control over moves, food, gifts and even taste.

I discovered that most of the guides and drivers have hideous bargains with owners or managers of restaurants, hotels, bazaars and giftshops. So a guide or a driver leads a group of tourists to the place where he can get a commission. Guides and drivers have changed into mere money makers.

This conduct is unlawful, illegal and uncivilised. A tourist guide makes a bigger profit than a tourist office or firm. This must oblige business owners to raise prices to make a reasonable profit, which makes a tour in Jordan very expensive and unpleasant. In addition, this phenomenon has caused a lot of quarrels, unpleasant experiences and has generated very bad impressions about Jordan and its friendly, kind and generous people.

Moreover, the majority of guides and drivers lack proficiency in foreign languages, tidy appearance and some of them lack good manners. These are fatal demerits in any business — especially tourism and travel.

So I would suggest that the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourist Guides Association put down and carry out a wise and strict policy to uproot these unfair practices and ugly phenomena. Any guide or driver who violates the rules and principles of this policy must be punished. Penalties must be applied gradually, running from warning to withdrawal of licence.

I hope and trust you will take your part in the struggle against those guides and drivers who defame a beautiful country like Jordan and sacrifice its vital interests for their own selfish interests.

We sincerely hope that you solve this problem of guides and drivers.

Our target is to bring tourist groups to the Kingdom, and not via Israel. Prices and costs are now well known to all people involved in tourism. So, we cannot convince our clients of the unreal costs of a very short stay in Jordan. We hope the utmost will be done to remedy all demerits and create a new, favourable situation for tourists in Jordan (stay, services, employees, fees and prices). Only then can we do good business together.

Fridrick Stein Tours,
Konrad Adenauer Str. 118/A,
Postfach 2616 — Tel. 61781781,
Köln, Germany.

هذا هو النص

Israeli soldier, Hizbollah fighter killed in South Lebanon clashes

TYRE, Lebanon (Agencies) — An Israeli soldier and Hizbollah fighter were killed in clashes Friday in South Lebanon that sparked an Israeli air strike and an artillery duel, security sources said.

The Iranian-backed Hizbollah said its guerrillas launched five attacks on Israeli positions in an occupied border zone. One fighter died in the clashes, it said, adding that the Israelis lost a Merkava tank.

Apart from the soldier killed, three other Israelis were wounded in the attacks, during which the guerrillas fired mortars and anti-tank rockets, security sources said.

Following the attacks, an Israeli fighter-bomber fired two air-to-surface missiles near the town of Habush, at the edge of the occupied zone, police said.

Hizbollah and the Israeli army also fought a fierce artillery duel.

Lebanese police said

Israeli gunners fired more than 200 shells towards the outskirts of the towns of Nabatiyeh and Kfar Rummaneh. There was no report of civilian casualties.

Dozens of shells fell on villages, causing panic among civilians. Schools were closed as children were kept home.

There was no immediate word on casualties from the retaliatory shelling, which lasted more than three hours.

Israeli warplanes at 10:00 a.m. (0800 GMT) raided suspected Hizbollah positions in an area in South Lebanon between Iqlim Al Tufah and Nabatiyeh.

Security officials said the targeted area is often used by Hizbollah guerrillas as a launching pad for operations against Israeli troops and for the transfer of weapons between the two areas. The officials said two Israeli fighter-bombers fired two air-to-surface missiles, causing no

injuries.

Five Israeli soldiers have been killed and 25 wounded in Hizbollah attacks in southern Lebanon since the beginning of the year.

Seventy-three Israeli soldiers were killed on Feb. 4 when two helicopters heading for southern Lebanon collided over northern

At least one guerrilla was killed Thursday in a clash with Israeli troops and their allied militiamen in South Lebanon.

Sources in the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army militia said three guerrillas were killed, but an Israeli army statement later said "one terrorist was killed" in the encounter.

Hizbollah is leading a guerrilla war to dislodge Israel's 1,200 soldiers and 2,500 militiamen from the South Lebanon border enclave. Israel set up the self-declared "security zone" in 1985.

Palestinians stage protests

(Continued from page 1)

Movement (Hamas) has said Israel would "pay a very high price" for Har Homa and threatened attacks on Jewish settlers in retaliation for the project.

The worshippers spread straw and plastic prayer mats in a muddy soccer field next to the site where bulldozers may begin as early as Monday to clear the ground.

The prayer leader, Sheikh Khalil Amireh, warned of violent protests. "The whole area is going to go up in flames. We are strong because we have faith and love for our land. We will not give it to someone else," Sheikh Amireh said.

Dozens of Israeli police, some in riot gear, watched the prayer protest from several metres away, and dozens of soldiers stood on a nearby ridge overlooking the West Bank. The service ended without incident.

Mohammad Jamal, a prayer leader at Al Aqsa, said Palestinians were

ready to die for Jerusalem. "The unbelievers don't understand how the Muslims are eager for martyrdom," Mr. Jamal said.

However, it appeared that despite angry statements, Palestinian leaders were trying to prevent rather than encourage violence.

By next Friday, Israel is to withdraw from some West Bank land — the first of three pullbacks to be completed by mid-1998 as part of last month's U.S.-brokered agreement between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu.

An Israeli government official has said Israel would probably withdraw from a larger area next week than initially planned.

Israeli media said troops would leave about 10 per cent of the West Bank — rather than the two per cent decided on earlier — in the first stage of withdrawal if the Palestinians kept quiet over the Arab East Jerusalem construction project.

EU commissioner urges Denktash to end isolation

NICOSIA (AFP) — European Union (EU) commissioner

Hans van den Broek urged Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash on Friday to end his community's isolation and help reunite the divided island.

"Mr. Denktash please bring your community out of isolation, out of exile," Mr. Van den Broek told reporters after meeting Mr. Denktash and Greek-Cypriot leaders on a visit to assess Cyprus's bid for EU membership.

"The lack of communications can be felt when you speak to the people in the north, ordinary people not only politicians, they want a solution," said Mr. Van den Broek, referring to Turkish-held northern Cyprus.

"They want contacts with their compatriots of Cyprus," he added. The EU commissioner, who is responsible for membership talks, also warned the Turkish-Cypriots that their self-declared state, which is only recognised by Ankara, will never be

accepted by the European Union.

"Don't ask us to recognise the independent state of the north, nobody in the world does that," Mr. Van den Broek said. "We want to abide by U.N. resolutions."

The commissioner said earlier that progress in Cyprus peace talks would facilitate the island's EU membership and he called for direct talks between Mr. Denktash and the Greek-Cypriot president of Cyprus, Glafcos Clerides.

Mr. Clerides and Dr. Denktash have not met since 1994.

"We want a bi-zonal federal Cyprus and we are fighting for this goal," Mr. Van den Broek said on Wednesday.

Doubts about Cyprus being brought into the EU without a political settlement have been fuelled by a German-led drive to include the Turkish-Cypriots in the entry negotiations, which the EU is committed to starting by the end of 1997.

Iraq says it wants to increase oil exports

(Continued from page 1)

approved by the U.N. Sanctions Committee.

The World Health Organisation warned Thursday that Iraq's health system is close to collapse, amid the complaints that it has secured no medical supplies under the U.N. deal (see page 2).

In a sign of movement, Swede Staffan De Mistura was named the new U.N. relief coordinator for Iraq on Thursday, with immediate effect. The United Nations in New York said he would arrive in Baghdad in the next few days.

One third of the 151 observers due to be deployed in Iraq to supervise implementation of the oil-for-food accord have arrived. However, so many "protections" were built into the programme to prevent the government from siphoning off money.

Gen. Rashid noted that after subtracting deductions for compensation to Kuwait and for other U.N. programmes, the \$1 billion earned in the first three months really amounts to \$660 million for food and medicines.

"That is \$220 million per month which means \$10 a month per person," he said. "It is much, much below what a normal person in a normal country will need."

The U.N. sanctions are to remain in place on overall oil exports until it's determined that Iraq has destroyed all its weapons of mass destruction.

But Gen. Rashid said he hoped that the chief U.N. weapons inspector, Rolf Ekeus of Sweden, would soon recommend an end to the sanctions.

"During the last visit we have given him solid information and very extensive accounting of the Iraqi missiles," Gen. Rashid said. "We have every reason to believe that in the coming few weeks he will acknowledge that Iraq has fulfilled its obligations."

During Mr. Ekeus' last visit, Iraq agreed to overseas examination of buried missile engines to show that they were being destroyed and not saved for future use. The weapons are to be examined in the United States.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has said that the first deliveries of relief aid to Iraq would begin on Saturday.

"We are going to begin on March 1. Things are going well enough but obviously

ly we have to closely follow the situation in Iraq," Mr. Annan told reporters when asked about the oil-for-food deal following talks with French Prime Minister Alain Juppe.

The United Nations on Thursday named Mr. De Mistura, a veteran U.N. official for relief assistance in world troublespots, as the new coordinator for humanitarian aid in Iraq.

Mr. De Mistura is expected to take up his new post this week, replacing Gualtiero Gulberri of Italy, who left Baghdad on Monday.

An official of the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), Mr. Mistura was the chief U.N. humanitarian coordinator in northern Iraq in mid-1991 when Kurds fled to Turkey to escape Iraqi bombardments.

He served in Somalia in 1992-1994, supervising all U.N. humanitarian aid there. Before that he was in Dubrovnik when that city was under siege during Croatia's war of independence from Yugoslavia.

During the Ethiopian famine in 1984-85, he coordinated air drops of food by Western and eastern bloc countries — a major feat during the cold war.

Mr. De Mistura's languages include Arabic.

The United States meanwhile dismissed as an "almost comical offer" a suggestion by an official Iraqi newspaper that Baghdad was prepared to open a dialogue with Washington.

Al Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath Party, said Iraq realised that the United States had vital interests in the Gulf. "Iraq has no interest in fighting the United States or being hostile to it. It has more than one advantage in dealing with it," it said. "This is really an almost comical offer," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns.

Mr. Burns said that if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein wanted a dialogue he first had to fulfill U.N. resolutions stemming from Iraq's 1991 Gulf war defeat. "and he hasn't done that in any way, shape or form."

"So there's no reason for us to have a dialogue with him when he continues to try to cheat on the U.N. sanctions," Mr. Burns told reporters.

"There's a lot he needs to answer for. He can't get away with this cheap offer and expect that we're going to take it seriously."

Netanyahu pushed Bar-On nomination

(Continued from page 1)

The transcript showed that Mr. Hanegbi warmly recommended Mr. Bar-On, and that the justice minister was vague on whether the chief justice of the supreme court, Aharon Barak, had given his blessing.

"I told the head of the supreme court of this (the Bar-On appointment) as well as the attorney general, who welcomed it and said he would help during the handover period," Mr. Hanegbi said.

Mr. Barak reportedly told police during questioning that he had opposed Mr. Bar-On as a choice for attorney general.

Israel TV reported Thursday that police are likely to indict Mr. Hanegbi, Mr. Deri

and Netanyahu aide Avigdor Lieberman on charges ranging from conspiracy to breach of trust.

The Maariv daily said Friday that Mr. Netanyahu would be questioned against next week, but that police had no proof that he backed the Bar-On appointment due to pressure from Mr. Deri. Mr. Netanyahu was questioned earlier this month, and was warned by police that criminal charges might be filed against him.

The opposition Labour Party has said the scandal could signal the end of the Likud government and that it was preparing for new elections. But Labour leader Shimon Peres had called for restraint by the party.

Rabbi Elmer Berger — thinker in the tradition of humanistic universalism

By Dr. Naseer Aruri

ONE OF the great moral leaders of our time has departed, leaving a broad legacy which spans six decades. Rabbi Elmer Berger, who died on Oct. 6, 1996, in his home at Long Boat Key in Florida at the age of 88, was an intellectual who authored a half-dozen books and scores of articles in popular magazines and specialised journals. He was an activist, lecturer, philosopher and theologian. He graduated from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and the University of Cincinnati, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

Dr. Berger's legacy comprises two major themes: first, Judaism as a religion of universal values which does not assume a nationality; second, equality for every single human being in Palestine/Israel irrespective of whether that person is Jewish, Muslim, or Christian. Together, these themes constituted the message which characterised his professional life and long career. First as founder, executive director and executive vice president of the American Council for Judaism (1943-1967), and after 1968 as founder and president of the American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism.

The message was that peace in the Middle East requires the application of Judaism's commitment to truth and justice and the repudiation of Zionism's commitment to Palestinian dispossession, dispersion

and disenfranchisement. He rejected categorically the claim by Zionism and the state of Israel that all who profess Judaism as their faith belong automatically to a national entity called the "Jewish people."

Under Israeli law, all constituents of this "Jewish people" national entity are Israeli citizens with rights and obligations. This is the meaning of the claim that Israel "is the sovereign state of the Jewish people" — a claim which confers upon Israel an extraterritorial jurisdiction over Jews wherever they may be, a claim which resulted in the establishment of the society in which "Jews," to use Orwell's phrase, "would be more equal than others."

For Elmer Berger, who was ordained in 1932 and who served congregations in Pontiac and Flint, Michigan, early in his career, religion was "a private, individual matter of conscience," particularly in open, democratic societies. But when religion becomes a "determinant of rights, responsibilities and status, the resultant society is no longer democratic. Then territorial disputes are no longer negotiable by the simple adjustment of boundaries." The fusion of religion and politics in Israel made co-existence impossible.

Zionism's exclusion of non-Jews created a zero-sum situation which made an historic compromise rather elusive. The "peace-makers," all the way up to Oslo, can only pretend, for genuine peace was unattainable without addressing the fusion of religion

and politics in Israel, which made co-existence impossible. Hence ethnic cleansing and colonisation have been endemic to the Zionist movement throughout Israel's existence, no matter who was in power.

He wrote: "The unarguable political fact is that between Begin, the so-called 'extremist,' and (Chaim) Weizmann, the suave, deliberately ambiguous 'moderate,' the difference was one of only method or tactic; as indeed today (1984) the difference between a Kahane (the late Meir) and a Shamir or even a Peres, is one of only radicalism or gradualism."

Dr. Berger's opposition to this concept was very significant and it has far-reaching consequences. It is consistent with the humanitarian programmes which were the hallmark of his career and the essence of the movement which he led. It is an affirmation of the right of Americans identified as Jews to reject Israel's claim of extraterritoriality. Rabbi Berger had consistently reminded the U.S. government that its acquiescence in this extraterritoriality claim would seriously infringe upon the U.S. Constitution, because membership in this so-called "Jewish people" national entity, as defined by Israeli law, is determined by either religious or racial criteria.

The epitome of scholarship

This lifetime endeavour by Dr. Berger should not be mistaken for an esoteric,

intellectual, jurisprudential exercise. It was, in fact, the epitome of committed scholarship, which is rooted in the concepts of pluralist existence and common humanity. These concepts have the attributes of integration, equality for every human being, and democracy for everybody not only for a select body of citizens. Dr. Berger defended these concepts in countless speeches, debates, newsletters and treatises.

Rabbi Berger's scholarship also vindicates the democratic, secular, unitary solution proposed by the Palestinian national movement in 1968. He was not discouraged by those who abandoned that vision, condemning it as an impractical solution, utterly unsuitable for our imperfect world. He was not deterred by the emasculation of that vision and by its removal from the diplomatic agenda of the Middle East. For him, it was the only long-term alternative to the current system which Dr. Israel Shahak described, and the Oslo process has effectively confirmed, as apartheid.

This system makes its Jewish citizens and potential citizens, who have never even lived in the state, more equal than those who have a recognised claim to Palestinian nationality. In that sense, Dr. Berger perceived Zionist legislation as more grotesque than apartheid in South Africa. In a speech to the African National Congress on April 5, 1986, Rabbi Berger, whose preferred solution was the uni-

versal, multi-ethnic model, but who, nevertheless, endorsed the two-state formula on pragmatic grounds, said: "It would be impossible to go from where we are today to a unitary state. Palestinians must have a state to exercise their inalienable self-determination."

In his numerous speeches and debates, he often quoted from the scriptures with tremendous ease and confidence, often making his opponents uncomfortable and bewildered. Frequently they would resort to name-calling, labelling him "a self-hating Jew." But he would cling tenaciously to his conception of Judaism as a religion of universal values, as a covenant religion. To those "religious Zionists" who invoked the biblical promise in defense of Israel's creation and conquests, he said:

"The people were promised the land only if specified moral obligations were strictly fulfilled. In the biblical texts containing references to the return to Zion, no 'free lunch' is promised."

He defended his rejection of political Zionism as being consistent with the vision of Jeremiah and Isaiah. The latter described "the authentically restored Zion as one of which God would say, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.'" (Isaiah LVI, 7). Dr. Berger would also quote the dean of religion at Bar Ilan University in Israel, Professor Uri Simon, in defense of the spiritual, non-political, non-territorial Zionism:

"The land of Israel has been promised to the children of Israel... only if they fulfilled the command to become a light unto other nations, and not to oppress them."

Thus, the biblical promise required a disjunction for Elmer Berger between a "divine reward of exemplary human conduct and an illegal annexation of which the meeting hall of a contented Knesset or parliament is the symbol supreme."

"I recognise the sense of community among Jews: I reject the ethnic basis of Jewish life," wrote Morris Lazaron in the Atlantic

of freedom, of civil and political liberty, the free flow of ideas as well as the unrestricted movement of people and mixture of races.

Other Jewish thinkers in the same tradition include Rabbi Isaac Wise (1819-1900) and Professor Morris Cohen (1880-1947), both of whom regarded Zionism as a nationalist philosophy inherently dangerous to liberalism and whose end result is ghettoism. In fact, Cohen like Berger, had anticipated the U.N. condemnation of Zionism as "a form of racism and racial discrimination." For both, Zionism

and narcissistic ethnocentrism. They were all disturbed by the adverse effect of that narrow nationalism on Jewish values, by the moral dilemma with which Israel confronted world Jewry.

I. F. Stone exemplified that concern when he wrote: "Israel is creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the outside world, the welfare of Jewry depends on the maintenance of secular, non-racial, pluralistic societies. In Israel, Jewry finds itself defending a society in which mixed marriages cannot be legalised, in which the ideal is racist and exclusionist... That is what necessitated a re-examination of Zionist ideology." Such reexamination, for the sake of a just and durable peace in the Middle East, for the sake of Jews everywhere, and for the sake of co-existence and a common humanity, was the essence of Jewish humanistic universalism. It was the major concern of anti-Zionist Jewish thinkers, and it is also Elmer Berger's legacy.

Dr. Naseer Aruri is chancellor professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts. Dartmouth, U.S. His latest book is "The Obstruction of Peace: The U.S., Israel and the Palestinians". Common Courage Press, 1995. He was a long-time friend of Rabbi Berger. This article is reprinted from The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.

CBJ governor: Foreign currency deposits slipping in favour of dinar deposits

By Suleiman AlKhalidi
Reuters

AMMAN — Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) Governor Ziyad Fariz has forecast a buoyant economic performance in 1997 which will allow the country to exceed its 6.5 per cent growth target, helped by an inflow of foreign currency.

"There is no reason not to believe the economy will not meet the growth targets anticipated... All the indicators are that the growth target of 6.5 per cent in 1997 will be met," he told Reuters.

Dr. Fariz forecast extra foreign investment as the government proceeds in 1997 to implement a long-delayed privatisation drive as part of IMF-directed structural reforms.

Jordan has pledged under an IMF reform programme to speed up liberalisation of its economy, having attained monetary and fiscal stability after an economic crisis in 1989.

Forecasts of a better 1997 outlook are underpinned by prospects of more exports to the Palestinian market, gains from Iraq's "oil-for-food" deal by leading manufacturers and more sales by Jordan's export-oriented industry. Major joint-venture mining projects coming onstream will also boost foreign earnings.

Last year Jordan's gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which

was hit by a higher-than-expected food import bill, fell to 5.2 per cent, falling short of the 1996 target of 6.0 per cent.

A net inflow of dollar funds into dinar assets has raised net foreign currency cash reserves to around \$800 million. Dr. Fariz added. The target for end-1997 is \$1 billion, he said, which would meet an International Monetary Fund (IMF) target of four months' import cover, nearly double 1995 levels.

Repatriation of Jordanian capital from abroad, new investments, tourism revenue and buoyant remittances from citizens working abroad, have helped boost reserve levels, Dr. Fariz said.

He said increased confidence in the dinar was behind a trend since November which has seen foreign currency deposits slipping in favour of dinar deposits.

Growth in banks' dollar deposits had previously outpaced dinar deposit growth. Jordan's 20 private banks have a total deposit base of 5.98 billion dinars (\$8.45 billion) of which an estimated 2.36 billion dinars are in foreign currency.

"There has not only been a net inflow of dollars into the economy but also a change in the structure of deposits which is enhancing confidence in the dinar," Dr. Fariz added.

"The switching is likely to boost the excess in foreign exchange, thus enhancing the central bank's reserves and increasing the liquidity in the dinar," he added.

Bankers say the central bank has been a net buyer of dollars in the market over the last few months.

The central bank, keen to strengthen the stability of the dinar, fixed its exchange rate at the end of 1995 at 0.708 dinars to the dollar. But it later eased controls on foreign currency investments in capital markets, allowed corporate borrowing in dollars and further lifted restrictions on capital transfers.

"There is no fear of dollarisation, as the net impact is to reduce dollarisation..." he added.

Dr. Fariz said that the government's privatisation drive would help the Amman Financial Market attract more investors, both local and foreign, bringing more foreign exchange to the country.

The government, which has pledged to accelerate free market reforms, is studying selling holdings in profitable majority-state-owned concerns. It also plans to sell a 26 per cent stake in its profitable state telecommunications body to a strategic foreign investor by year end.

AFM chief willing to ask companies to publish annual accounts in English

By Samir Ghawi
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Wahib Shair, the director general of the Amman Financial Market (AFM), Thursday expressed interest in a proposal to request public shareholding companies to publish their annual financial statements in both Arabic and English.

Responding to a suggestion from the Jordan Times during a lunch Mr. Shair hosted Thursday for representatives of local newspapers and international agencies operating in the Kingdom, the director general said he would not be able to act on this proposal under the present companies' law.

"But the new companies law, being discussed in Parliament now, gives us (AFM) the liberty to request the companies to publish their financial statements in English," he indicated.

Mr. Shair agreed that such a step would provide foreign investors with information and data in a direct and highly transparent manner to enable those who do not understand Arabic to better understand the financial situation and the plans of major Jordanian companies.

Other topics covered during the business lunch were: The AFM's new premises, wider computerisation network and expected capitalisation of the AFM by the year 2000.

The AFM director said that about 135 companies were listed on the stock exchange and that 12 new

companies are currently seeking listing. He pointed out that the exchange's capitalisation stands at about \$5 billion at present but he predicted that the figure would double to \$10 billion by the year 2000 as new shares will be floated to the public over the coming three years.

Mr. Shair saw the share flotations coming from the privatisation of Jordan's Royal Jordanian and the telecommunication, electricity and refinery

companies.

Asked about the new premises, Mr. Shair said that the building project behind the Regency Hotel would take time. He expected the completion date to be by the year 2000 at the earliest.

The new premises will be equipped with the latest techniques but the computerisation network was seen inadequate by the journalists who pointed out that the offices of the brokers were not included in the modernisation setup.

Mr. Shair agreed that the internal operations of the brokers should be computerised and said he would consider such a step even if the AFM has to bear the cost and have the brokers repay the bills in future instalments.

The informal gathering was the first organised by the AFM for journalists who commended Mr. Shair for the initiative and expressed the hope that other similar beneficial meetings be held in the near future.

REUTERS

REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.6891	0.6143	1.4760	120.80	1.3663	1688.61	1.8963	5.6985
DE Mark	0.5925	-	0.6366	0.8933	163.65	1.3663	16.88	1.8963	5.6985
GB Sterling	1.6280	2.7495	-	2.4019	196.63	2.2243	2749.82	3.0829	8.2910
Swiss Franc	0.6725	1.1294	0.8933	-	112.94	0.8933	1129.4	1.1294	3.0829
Yen	0.0083	1.3963	0.5078	1.2197	-	1.1294	13.87	157.11	4.7454
Italian Lira	0.0006	0.9988	0.3633	0.8873	159.78	0.8882	-	11.23	3.3731
FR Franc	0.1755	0.2360	0.1077	25.8686	21.17	0.2396	33.28	33.2900	-

Energy

Oils	Last	Previous
Brent	19.85	20.25
Bony	18.85	20.25
DL Gas	185.00	195.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4503	0.18379	0.39348	32.2383
Qatar Dinar	0.1700	0.2850	0.11333	0.24000	19.6000
KW Dinar	3.3003	5.57414	2.02718	4.87092	399.042
BR Dinar	0.2770	0.4728	0.18946	0.39348	32.2383
CY Pound	1.9737	3.3285	1.2186	2.9083	238.218

Metal Prices

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz)	357.9	358.4
Platinum (oz)	385	389
CU (3 Months)	N/A	N/A
LEAD (3 Months)	N/A	N/A
ALU (3 Months)	N/A	N/A

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)

Period	-1-	-3-	-6-	-9-	-12-
Cncy Month	Months	Months	Months	Months	Year
USD	5.31	5.40	5.48	5.58	5.84
JPY	0.35	0.50	0.50	0.37	0.56
FRF	3.20	3.23	3.27	3.30	3.34
ITL	7.51	7.25	7.12	7.01	7.00

Market Indexes

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls
New York	DOW JONES	6889.66	-55.41	-0.8	6923.32	6868.5	6825.07
London	FT-SE 100	4309.4	-29.8	-0.69	4340.4	4299.3	4339.2
Paris	CAC 40	2607.55	-21.85	-0.83	2633.22	2588.33	2628.4

Energy

Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/bis)	180.17	Spot
Sugar (c/bis)	311.5	Spot
Soy (c/bis)	22.59	Spot
Barley (c/bis)	2.59	Spot

* JOD Cross Rates

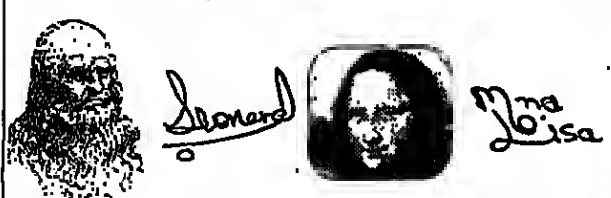
Currency	Bid	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
DE Mark	0.1153	0.1163
DE Mark	0.4184	0.4205
FR Franc	0.1242	0.1248
NL Guilder	0.3722	0.3741

Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

A THANK YOU NOTE

Our sincere thanks and appreciation to Dajani Jewellers for their inspiration, resulting in making the portrait of Mona Lisa a universal success.

Rome, February 28, 1503.



Wait-and-see climate prevails at AFM

By a Jordan Times
Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Investors at the Jordanian bourses adopted a wait-and-see approach this week, and turnover dropped sharply but prices improved marginally, brokers said Friday.

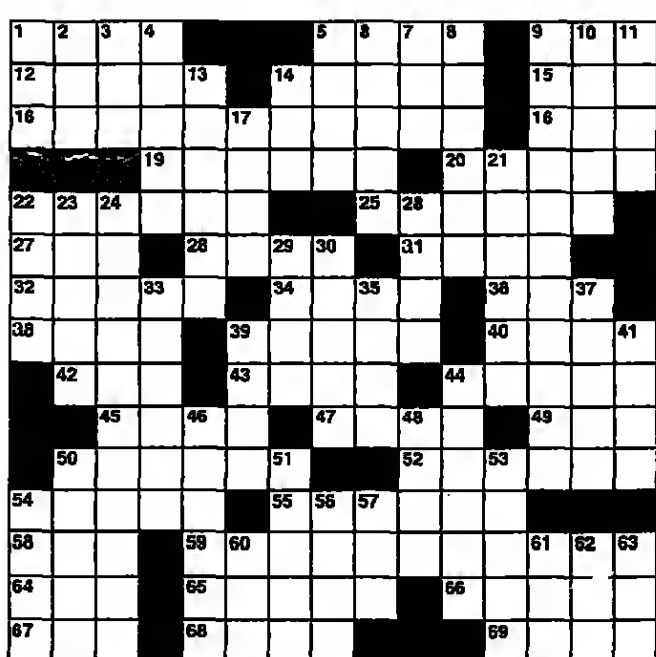
Brokers said investors had adopted positions after bullying the market amid enthusiasm over the abolition of a capitalisation tax.

One depressing factor, however, was uncertain prospects for local manufacturing industries which have secured export contracts worth \$120 million to Iraq but are unable to execute the deals since they have not been given the green light by the U.N. Sanctions Committee.

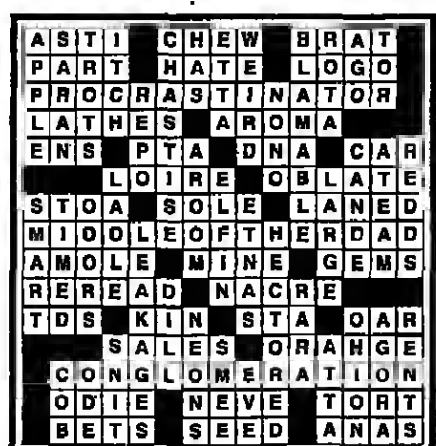
(Continued on page 9)

THE Daily Crossword

- ACROSS
- 1 Females
 - 2 Return of the — (film)
 - 3 You stand to lose it
 - 4 Planet
 - 5 Dimmed
 - 6 Vigoda
 - 7 Treat with style
 - 8 — is mel
 - 9 Reveled
 - 10 In any way
 - 11 Different ones
 - 12 Reach
 - 13 Marker
 - 14 Red's state
 - 15 Fix
 - 16 — a gun!
 - 17 Bonito
 - 18 Author John — Passos
 - 19 Miss Kett
 - 20 Sailors
 - 21 Part of QED
 - 22 Posed
 - 23 NC college
 - 24 Zeal
 - 25 Stack role
 - 26 Close to
 - 27 Comp. dir.
 - 28 "Life is but —"
 - 29 Alarms
 - 30 Slip
 - 31 — Way
 - 32 Neighbor of Cal.
 - 33 Compromise
 - 34 system
 - 35 Physician, for short
 - 36 Corundum
 - 37 Sea duck
 - 38 Sign
 - 39 Carry on
 - 40 Strobilus



by Roger Coburn



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- DOWN
- 1 Make clothes
 - 2 "Beli —"
 - 3 Eagle
 - 4 Cubic meter
 - 5 Broken-down horse
 - 6 Omil a syllable
 - 7 Cub scout unit
 - 8 Conceive
 - 9 Police TV show

- 10 Put up — front
- 11 Remove the ring (liquor drink)
- 12 Time zone
- 13 — a limb
- 14 Westerns
- 15 Maui goose
- 16 Lyons river
- 17 Butte
- 18 — bien
- 19 Game room
- 20 Folksinger Pete
- 21 Conceive
- 22 Slugger Hank

- 51 Expert
- 52 Silly act
- 53 CA city
- 54 Sassy
- 55 Salary
- 60 — Yankee Doodle...
- 61 Commotion
- 62 Barbi's mate
- 63 Previous to

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1997

By Thomas S. Pierson,
Astrologer, Carroll
Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Handle important obligations today, and don't allow some personal concern to upset your schedule. If your mate complains, stay calm and everything will be peaceful if you allow him or her to be left alone.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You should not expect any favours of others today, as they have affairs of their own to handle. Try to be more responsible and self-reliant in handling of career activities and you will gain recognition of a bigwig.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There may be much confusion around you today, however, maintain your poise and you can handle any difficulties which develop. You can be diplomatic and objective later this evening with fellow associates.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) A new situation will attract you today, however, study every phase of it before becoming involved and you can defuse any difficulties. You will meet a helpful person, who is knowledgeable and understanding towards your situation.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) There could be an error in some obligation you have assumed today, so do your best to resolve it. Listen carefully to your mate's desires, so that you can be sympathetic and understanding towards his or her difficulties.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Having a discussion with fellow associate will, do little good at this time, since your ideas differ greatly, so you should wait until there is a meeting of the minds. You can get involved in any public matters later this evening.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) With the assistance of friends today, try to iron out any difficulties in your present situation. Make notes later this evening of requests for assistance from your fellow associate who wish to speak their minds.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Make sure you know the cost of a pleasure today before getting into it or you could find yourself short of funds when it really counts. Don't take a chance on going out later this evening without enough money for any contingency.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Study the situation at home today of any difficulties, and be sure you know what is really going on there. You should not try to pull a fast one on a family friend or you could lose any respect with him or her.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Check into any travel and communication matters today, and improve your plans if possible. You may have to rely later this evening on close friends for assistance, so don't hesitate to make inquiries.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Study every aspect of your financial affairs today before you reach any definite decisions. You should not rely on advice from your usual sources, since there have been conditions present which questions their validity.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You have several options for gaining a personal aim today, however, wait a while before reaching a decision in relation to career activities. Don't offer advice to friends at this time or they could be resentful.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper.

Indo-Jordan joint venture to begin phosphoric acid exports next month

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The first shipment of phosphoric acid produced by a \$170 million Indo-Jordan joint venture will head for India in mid-April, two months ahead of schedule, the company said Thursday.

Babu Varghese, managing director of the Indo-Jordan Chemicals Company, also said he expected the company would export phosphoric acid worth \$90 million to India in its first full year of operation.

The company is a joint venture between India's Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation Limited (SPIC) and the Jordanian Phosphate Mines Company (JPMC).

After a readjustment of equity, the \$63.3 million paid-up capital is held by

SPIC (52.2 per cent), JPMC 34.8 per cent and a Saudi Arabia-based Arab investment house (13 per cent), Mr. Varghese said.

The company raised \$100.2 million in international loans and \$6 million from local banks to build the \$169.5 million plant, located at Shidiyah in southern Jordan adjoining the largest rock-phosphate mining facility in the Kingdom.

Work began 15 months ago on the plant, which includes a 700-tonne-a-day phosphoric acid plant and a 200-tonne-a-day sulphuric acid plant in addition to associated utilities at Shidiyah and an acid storage facility at the port of Aqaba.

The company will produce 220,000 tonnes of phosphoric acid every year and export the entire output to SPIC in India, where it will be used to

manufacture diammonium phosphate (DAP), a fertiliser under heavy demand among Indian farmers.

At present market prices, the output will be worth \$90 million, said Mr. Varghese.

"The first shipment, which will be worth \$3 million, will leave Aqaba in mid-April as we completed building the plant ahead of schedule," he added.

Jordan is the world's fifth largest producer and third largest exporter of rock phosphates.

The joint venture is Jordan's first major project realised under its strategy to switch to finished fertilizers rather than raw rock phosphates as one of its main exports following a change of trend in the international market since 1990.

Wait-and-see climate prevails

(Continued from page 8)

The Amman Financial Market (AFM) said in its weekly report that trading volume for the week ending was 2.7 million dinars, down by nearly half from the previous week's 5.8 million dinars.

Average daily trading was 540,000 dinars.

Sectional figures provided in the AFM report showed that industrial companies led the week's trading with a turnover of 1.19 million dinars.

Commercial banks and financial institutions came second with 1.05 million dinars.

Service sector firms rang up 410,000 dinars (\$378,100) and insurance companies 24,000 dinars.

While the turnover dipped, share prices improved a little, the official share price index closed for the week at 156.82 points, up 0.53 points or 0.34 per cent.

Commercial banks and investment houses gained 0.65 per cent during the week, industrials 0.17 per cent and insurance firms 0.05 per cent while service sector firms shed

1.32 per cent.

The AFM report said shares of 81 companies were involved in the week's business. As trading closed, 23 of them showed gains and 45 losses while 13 remained stable.

"The market was not very active this week," said a broker, who like all AFM dealers, cannot be quoted by name under standing market guidelines. "Speculators have adopted positions ahead of the expected announcement of free shares by more than 15 companies in the next few weeks," added the broker.

That was a reference to general assembly meetings when many companies would present proposals to issue bonus shares to shareholders in a process of capitalising voluntary reserves and profits.

The capitalisation move comes after Parliament approved an amendment to the tax law and lifted a 15 per cent tax on reserves and profits turned into capital.

"Most shares in circulation of the companies

expected to issue free stocks have been gobbled up by speculators, who are now poised for the kill," added the broker.

However, the overall enthusiasm was a little dampened by a report early last week that the U.N. Sanctions Committee had not gotten around to studying Iraqi purchase agreement signed with Jordanian companies.

"It does not necessarily mean that the deals would not be approved, but the delay is posing serious problems for several companies which have already invested heavily ahead of the execution of the orders," said a senior banker.

Forty-two Jordanian companies have signed deals worth \$120 million with Iraq to supply foodstuffs, detergents and medicine.

Their plight is not different from dozens of companies from various other countries which are also waiting for U.N. Sanctions Committee approval.

The government said last week that it was making efforts at the U.N. to accelerate the process of approval of the contracts.

JORDANIAN FINANCIAL MARKET HOUSING BANK OFFICE - AMMAN - JORDAN TELEPHONE: 667171 / 407179 ORGANIZED MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (31/03/1997 - 31/03/1997) WEEKLY REPORT													
DURING THE LAST WEEK		COMPANY NAME	P/E	DIV	NO. OF CONTRACTS	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSING PRICE	CHANGE	MARKET SHARE
RISE	FALL												
264,000	255,500	ABAS BANK	14.6	1.32	48	1628	699660	363.00	365.00	361.50	366.00	+3.00	283,538
3,100	1,900	JOR. NATIONAL BANK	-	0.00	171	161638	507806	3.03	3.06	2.99	3.00	-0.03	3,038
6,100	4,900	CAIRO JORDAN BANK	10.3	3.00	1	10000	50000	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.00	6,000
3,400	1,100	BANK OF JORDAN	12.6	0.00	3	12930	41121	3.13	3.21	3.11	3.21	+0.10	3,300
1,150	1,120	KID-REX TRV. INC.	49.0	0.00	24	27100	28333	1.15	1.23	1.06	1.05	-0.10	1,065
1,450	3,320	INDUSTRIAL DEV. INC.	5.4	5.87	9	3554	6043	3.33	3.33	3.33	3.37	+0.04	3,374
4,930	4,720	THE HOUSING INC.	12.4	3.34	11	3009	14188	4.71	4.76	4.70	4.70	-0.01	4,719
3,520	2,480	JOR. INDUSTRIAL BANK	30.1	0.00	14	3800	8250	5.77	5.80	5.76	5.77	-	3,756
4,970	5,900	JOR. TRV. INC.	5.1	8.14	117	166762	136156	.90	.90	.86	.86	-0.04	860
3,600	3,400	ABAS TRV. INC.	19.6	0.00	1	50	383	6.40	6.46	6.46	6.46	+0.05	3,460
4,000	3,720	JOR. INDUSTRIAL BANK	18.3	0.00	38	4390	24744	3.66	3.63	3.64	3.63	-0.01	3,672
1,400	1,440	TRV. INC. TRV. INC.	104.8	0.00	6	3150	3103	1.47	1.46	1.43	1.46	+0.01	1,443
3,380	3,370	JOR. TRV. INC.	17.7	0.00	18	442	3121	3.38	3.36	3.36	3.38	+0.02	3,313
4,750	4,750	ABAS BANKING CO.	25.8	0.00	3	2000	4890	4.75	4.29	4.99	4.23	-0.24	4,990
1,380	1,180	PRELIM. TRV. INC.	-	0.00	26	21476	25616	1.20	1.21	1.27	1.21	+0.01	1,123
GRAND TOTAL													
1569	1111	1569	1111	1569	1111	1569	1111	1569	1111	1569	1111	1569	1111

JORDANIAN FINANCIAL MARKET HOUSING BANK OFFICE - AMMAN - JORDAN TELEPHONE: 667171 / 407179 PARALLEL MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (31/03/1997 - 31/03/1997) WEEKLY REPORT													
DURING THE LAST WEEK		COMPANY NAME	P/E	DIV	NO. OF CONTRACTS	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSING PRICE	CHANGE	MARKET SHARE
RISE	FALL												
530	480	GENERAL DEV. TRADING	18.3	0.00	3	1000	465	.48	.47	.46	.47	+0.01	.468
630	540	JOR. TRV. INC.	12.6	0.00	60	128749	46103	.56	.56	.54	.55	-0.02	.548
480	440	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	51	62423	43937	.46	.46	.45	.46	-	.455
730	720	UNION TRV. INC.	67.9	0.00	51	83784	13029	.73	.71	.70	.71	+0.01	.700
700	480	ABAS TRV. INC.	14.7	0.00	15	14304	5719	.60	.60	.58	.60	-0.02	.583
440	400	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	13	6000	4291	.42	.42	.41	.42	+0.01	.414
600	470	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	43	109389	56303	.40	.40	.39	.40	+0.01	.398
360	250	JOR. TRV. INC.	-	0.00	11	10300	14900	.38	.38	.37	.38	+0.01	.378
1,430	1,390	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	11	10300	14900	.38	.38	.37	.38	+0.01	.378
670	660	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	26	15000	8055	.64	.63	.63	.63	-0.01	.637
660	650	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	11	8270	5084	.60	.60	.59	.60	+0.01	.591
1,410	1,370	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	13	16200	7293	.66	.63	.62	.62	-0.04	.610
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610	460	ABAS TRV. INC.	-	0.00	23	50982	35331	.50	.51	.47	.47	-0.03	.497
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Angry at tax man, Becker to quit Germany: report

BONN (AFP) — Former world tennis champion Boris Becker is to quit his German homeland for good next week after being annoyed by the attentions of the tax man, Bild newspaper reported Friday.

"He has finished with Germany," the paper quoted a trusted friend as saying.

The triple Wimbledon winner, whose Munich home was raided in December by tax inspectors, plans to set up permanent home in Florida, Bild said.

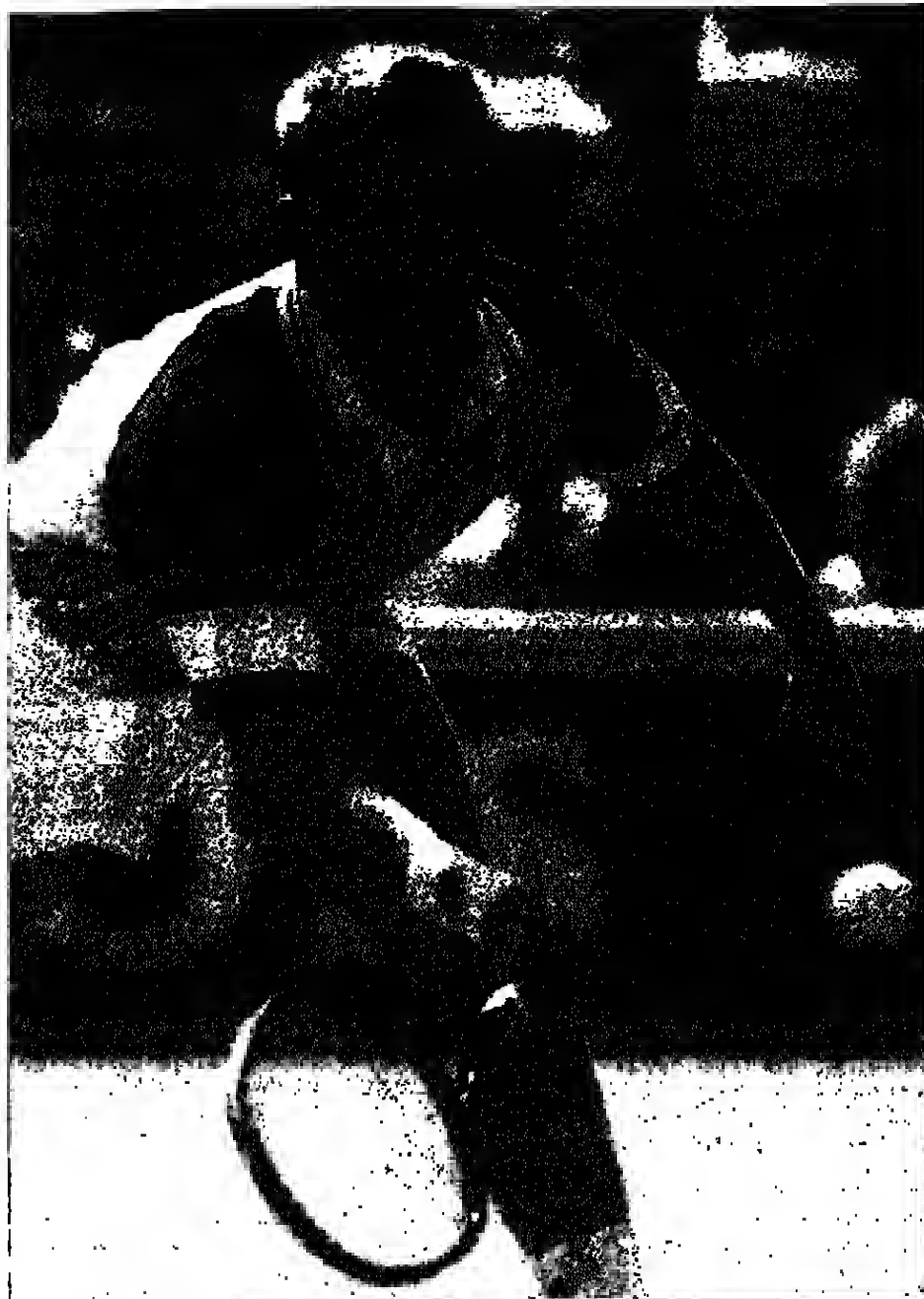
Becker will say good-bye to Germany when he goes to Florida next week in preparation for a tournament in Key Biscayne, according to the popular broadsheet.

It said he had been upset by the tax inspectors' search through his and his family's private possessions.

Germany's top woman tennis player, World No. 1 Steffi Graf, has been involved in a major case of tax evasion on her earnings, for which her manager-father was jailed earlier this year.

Becker returned to Germany in 1994 after earlier taking up residence in the "tax haven" of Monte Carlo.

German Formula 1 racing champion Michael Schumacher, himself resident in Switzerland, said Friday: "I can understand Boris's leaving Germany again."



Boris Becker

Kenya's Ngugi denied U.S. visa

LONDON (R) — Former Olympic 5,000 metres champion and five times world cross country champion John Ngugi has been refused a U.S. visa which would have allowed him to compete in Sunday's Los Angeles marathon.

The 34-year-old Kenyan, who is training in London, was informed by U.S. Embassy officials that his application had been rejected despite a direct appeal from Ollan Cassell, former executive director of U.S.A. Track and Field.

In a letter to John Bicoeur, the athlete's manager and coach, U.S. Consular officials said they were concerned that Ngugi was intending to move to the United States permanently, along with two fellow Kenyan runners, Charles Sbabano and Mbarack Hussein.

In 1992, in Boston, Ngugi won the last of his five world cross country titles.

The Kenyan has been concentrating on the marathon since he returned to competition in May 1995, following a 26-month absence from the sport after refusing to take a drug test.

Ngugi was banned for four years but re-instated in May 1995 on a unanimous vote under the IAAF's exceptional circumstances rule because of the lack of information available to him at the time he refused to take the test in 1992 and a language problem.

Olympic champions make a run at world meet

ATLANTA (AFP) — Olympic champions Gail Devers, Gwen Torrence, Allen Johnson, Charles Austin and Jead Miles pace the field for the U.S. indoor track and field championship that begins here at the weekend.

Prize money for next week's World Indoor Championships at Paris inspired some top athletes into training for this meet, the only U.S. qualifier for the world indoors.

But most have elected to wait for outdoors and the allure of greater riches at world outdoor final in Athens. Olympic 200- and 400-meter champion Michael Johnson, for instance, will attend only as a television commentator.

A featured 60m showdown between Devers and Torrence repeats a matchup of last weekend, where Devers won in 7.07 seconds and Torrence came second in 7.12.

"You never know with U.S. who will win," Devers said. "That's what keeps this going. What brings people back is head-to-head excitement."

Some of the mystery is dimmed because Torrence has said she will not go to the Paris meet even if she qualifies. She has not trained hard but plans to push the Atlanta and Barcelona 100m champion anyway.

"I can't compare the Olympics to Atlanta this time around," said Torrence, who won 100m bronze here at the centennial games. "The work I put in to get those good times last year has not gone into the indoor season."

Miles anchored the Atlanta Olympic gold medal 4x400m relay and placed fifth at 400m in the games. Her goal is to repeat as U.S. 400m indoor champion and challenge at Paris.

"From the times I have pulled up on the

Internet, I am going to have to run really fast to be competitive in Paris," she said. "It will be competitive."

Austin, who struggled with financial disaster before winning Olympic high jump gold, had poor showings in two European tuneup events.

"It was more my lack of jumping than I couldn't get the height," he said. "I'm still a little rusty."

Austin faced foreclosure on his house before last year's Olympics but came through with the performance of his life to save the things that helped give it meaning.

"I almost lost my house, my car, everything," Austin said.

"Trying to support my family, I didn't have the income. There was no one to turn to for help."

"It would have been really tough if I had not made the final. I probably would have had to sell my house. Now I get help from USA Track and Field and appearance fees in Europe. Everything looks very bright now."

Allen Johnson has won hurdles gold at the Olympics and world indoor and outdoor meets. His main foes here will be collegian Reggie Torian and Roger Kingdom, who won Olympic outdoor sprint hurdles gold in 1984 and 1988.

Also set to compete is weight thrower Jud Logan, making his return to championship competition after being suspended four years following a positive drug test at the Barcelona games.

"I'm not putting any pressure on myself," said Logan, who was reinstated earlier this month by the International Amateur Athletic Federation. "If I enjoy myself and have some good results outdoors, hopefully I will make it to Athens."



Pete Sampras

Sampras advances but Courier falls in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA (AFP) — World No. 1 Pete Sampras survived four broken services to advance at a \$589,250 ATP Tournament Thursday but fellow American Jim Courier joined a set of sidelined seeds.

Sampras extended his win streak to 17 matches by beating Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman 7-5, 7-6 (7/2).

"It was the type of match that was very difficult to win because he was playing very well," Sampras said. "He was returning as well as anyone has ever returned against me, especially off my second serve."

The match could have gone either way. He served for both sets. He was very capable of beating me and maybe my experience came through for me. I hit some good shots and played a good tie-breaker."

Courier, the defending champion and second seed here, was ousted by South Africa's Grant Stafford 6-3, 5-7.

"Generally, my return is one of my strengths, so when it's on, I'm going to be returning great," Stafford said. "And today was one of those days."

Sampras, a two-time champion here, advanced to a quarterfinal meeting Friday with fellow American, Doug Flach. Stafford, ranked 78th in the world, will meet Australia's Sandor Stolle.

The other quarterfinals match Zimbabwe's Byron Black and Austria's Patrick Rafter plus Dutchman Sjeng Schalken against American Jonathan Stark.

Sampras found himself in trouble in the first set after having his serve broken twice, but he recovered by breaking Bjorkman in the 10th game to pull even and in the 12th to take the set.

Bjorkman broke Sampras in the seventh and 11th games of the second set and served to even the match in the 12th game, but he double faulted on break point to force the tie-breaker.

Sampras found his service form in the tie-breaker, slamming down two aces on the way to a 5-0 lead and winning the match with two more.

Courier lasted one hour and 51 minutes but failed in his bid to be the first back-to-back winner here since Tim Mayotte completed the feat in 1988.

Stafford broke Courier in the fourth game of the third set with a forehand winner to take a 3-1 lead. He recorded his second break of the set and fifth of the match in the eighth game with a drop volley for the match-point winner.

"I came in hoping to do well here and actually feel like I played OK," courier said. "The other guy just played 'off his perch,' as they say in his home country. My hat goes off to him. He played unbelievably."

Leonard says he is ready for comeback against Camacho

ATLANTIC CITY (R) — It took Sugar Ray Leonard six years to decide he wanted to fight again, but only three months to get in shape to face Hector "Macho" Camacho this Saturday.

"When I first started training for this fight, my body had to go through a shock period," the 40-year-old Leonard said of the opening days of training camp in early December for the fight. "You know how you take your car for a tune-up? I had a complete overhaul."

"About a month ago, things started to click," said Leonard, who had retired in 1991 after taking a 12-

round beating from Terry Norris.

"I wanted to train, I wanted to go more rounds. I felt when I walked into the gym no pressure. I was excited about working out, trying some new moves, some new punches, combinations," said Leonard, a world champion in five different weight classes and a gold medal winner in the 1976 Olympics.

"Then I started throwing combinations, punching with power, with speed," Leonard said. "Then I started become more defensive naturally. All these things I had naturally were coming

back into play without working on it."

Leonard (36-2-1) looks fit and is listed as a 7-to-5 betting favorite for the scheduled 12-round bout at the Atlantic City convention centre. But looks can be deceiving, according to Camacho's trainer Jesse Reid.

"We have trained for the best of Leonard, but in the back of my mind I'm looking at his age and six years being away from boxing," Reid said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"And here he is fighting one of the most active champions in boxing right now and he is left-handed and he's quick," Reid said of the 34-year-old Camacho (63-3-1), who has fought 28 times in the years that Leonard has been inactive.

"I think he picked the wrong guy to start out with," Reid said. "I think he

is going to tire out and find out the reality of who he really is. And that reality is 40 years old."

"You have to think like, it's not a fight that Camacho, if he does what he has to do, should have that many problems with," Reid said.

While the attention has focused on Leonard and his comeback, the fight is equally significant to Camacho.

"This is a fight that I got to prove to myself and the public that I can be very masterful," said Camacho, who has held titles in various different weight divisions and will be defending his middleweight belt of the

little known International Boxing Council.

"Being masterful means make him miss, back him up quickly and show who is dictating, who is the fastest, who is smartest and obviously who is the champ and who is the star and who is used to be," said Camacho.

Reid obviously wants his fighter to win, but in a best case scenario it would be a close contest he says.

"If Sugar Ray Leonard can stay at a competitive edge with Camacho and Camacho wins I would feel a lot better than seeing sugar ray get old in the ring and lose," Reid said. "To me that would be another bad mark on boxing."

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Arab Champions Cup

Faisali face Morocco's Al Raja' tonight

By Mufeed Hassounah in Casablanca and Aileen Bannayan in Amman

AL FAISALI Saturday play Morocco's Al Raja' in their second match at the 3rd Arab Champions Cup currently underway in Casablanca, Morocco.

Al Faisali went down 4-0 to Egypt's Al Ahli in the opening match and are expected to give it their best today in order to attain an advanced standing. The match will be televised live on Channel 1 of Jordan Television at 7 p.m.

Following Thursday's match, Al Ahli's coach said he was satisfied with the result although the team had regrouped late with seven players busy with the Egyptian national team.

Al Faisali's manager Nihad Soufar congratulated Al Ahli and said his team's defeat was mainly due to the big difference in tactics and individual skills since, unlike other teams, none of Al Faisali's players are professionals.

Al Faisali are the first team representing Jordan in the elite competition alongside top three Arab teams: Arab Clubs Champions Al Ahli, runners-up Al Raja', and Arab Cup Winners Cup champions Olympic Khreibek of Morocco.

Khreibek and Raja' played to a goalless draw in Thursday's second match.

In their upcoming two matches, Al Faisali will be wearing the logo of the Arab Radio and Television (ART) who paid \$5,000 in sponsorship.

Al Faisali will be playing with their

substitute goalie after the head injury of Walid Abu Hmeid who hit the goal post and needed four stitches. Top goalie Anis Shafiq is also nursing an injury.

The Arab Champions Cup aims at naming the best Arab team as the event groups the top two teams of the Cup Winners Cup and League Champions.

Significant cash prizes await the participating teams with the winner receiving \$50,000, the runner-up \$25,000, the third place finisher \$15,000 and the fourth team \$10,000.

In addition, the Prince Faisal trophy and prize will be awarded to the ideal team. Each team will start the championship with 20 points. Two points will be deducted for each yellow card booking and 6 points for each suspension. There will also be prizes for top scorer, top goalie and best player. Hosts, Al Raja' will receive \$50,000 for hosting the event.

Al Faisali's 29-member delegation includes players: Anis Shafiq, Walid Abu Hmeid, Freidon Saeed, Mobannad Mahadin, Ahmad Khalil, Firas Khalaleh, Ali Zu'bi, Ihab Nasr, Rami Abu Fanar, Osama Talal, Rabea Awadat, Ziyad Abu Shanab, Jamal Abu Abed, Subhi Suleiman, Hassaneb Sheikh, Hatem Aqel, Haidham Shboul, Jiryes Tadros, Mahmoud Matar, Ja'far Hamad, Mansour Tawaiyah, Raed Jbour.

Federation Cup

Germany stare at 1st round defeat

Navratilova looks forward to challenge

PARIS (AFP) — Depleted Germany, champions five years ago, could be facing a shock first-round defeat against the Czech Republic when the 1997 Fed Cup gets underway this weekend.

German hopes of a new triumph in the women's equivalent of the Davis Cup nose-dived earlier this week when their top players both dropped out of the World Group One clash in Mannheim.

World No. 1 Steffi Graf, who is still nursing a knee injury, and in-form seventh-ranked Anke Huber, who is recovering from a shoulder strain, have both had to withdraw from the tie.

German hopes now fall on Barbara Rimmer, Elena Wagner, Marlene Weingartner and Sandra Kloesel and the home players will have their work cut out since the challenge by the newly-promoted Czechs will be spearheaded by the experienced Jana Novotna.

Novotna, who has won 30 of 40 matches in ten years of Fed Cup activity, played a vital role when the Czechs won promotion back to the World Group with a 3-1 victory over Argentina last year.

And she has shown sharp form so far this year by reaching the final at Hanover last weekend, going down in three tight sets against Croatia's Iva Majoli, and the semi-finals at the WTA events in Tokyo and Paris.

The other members of the Czech team, which will be captained by Novotna's tour coach Hana Mandlikova, will be the promising Adriana Gersl, Ludmila Richterova and Eva Martincova.

Elsewhere the spotlight will fall on two former

players who will be making their debuts as captains.

Martina Navratilova is in charge of the defending champions United States who face Holland in Haarlem.

And the inspirational Yannick Noah, who spearheaded France's 1996 Davis Cup triumph, leads his country's women for the first time against Japan in Tokyo.

The 40-year-old Czech-born Navratilova, who chalked up 20 singles and 17 doubles victories in the competition as a player, has named Mary Joe Fernandez, Gigi Fernandez, Chanda Rubin and Kim Po for the American team.

"We have a great team with a wonderful blend of rookies and veterans. We are looking forward to the challenge," Navratilova said.

Mary Joe Fernandez, currently ranked 15th in the world, made her Fed Cup debut in 1991. She was the key player in last year's first round, winning both her singles and the doubles with Gigi Fernandez against Austria in Salzburg.

Gigi Fernandez boasts 19 wins against just two defeats in Fed Cup doubles while Rubin, recent winner in Linz, is slowly coming back to her best after a season disrupted by a serious wrist injury.

Po will be playing Fed Cup for the first time.

Dutch captain Fred Hemmes has again opted for the power of big-serving Brenda Schultz-McCarthy to lead in the singles while Kristie Boogert, Miriam Oremans and Manon Bollegraf will make up the team.

France, eight times semi-finalists since first playing

the event back in 1963, are hoping some Yannick Noah magic will rub off on them and help bring them the trophy for the first time. But they face a tough opening tie in Tokyo, where Japan, even without the now-retired Kimiko Date, will be difficult to beat.

Noah, who will call up this year's Australian open finalist Mary Pierce for the singles, is expected to reward the hard work of experienced Nathalie Tauziat this winter by putting the 29-year-old player into both singles and doubles action.

The other members of the French squad are promising newcomer Anne-Gaëlle Sidot and Alexandra Fusai.

Japan's lineup will be Ai Sugiyama, Naoko Kijimuta, Naoko Sawamatsu and Nana Miyago.

In the final World Group one showdown, last year's beaten finalists Spain, with plenty to prove, visit Sprimont to face Belgium.

Top Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario is desperately seeking a return to form but she may find the going far from easy against the excellent Belgians Sabine Appelmans and Dominique Van Roost.

Spain have dominated the competition in recent years — winning the event in 1991, 1993, 1994 and 1995 before going down to the Americans in the 1996 final.

In Group Two, Australian Fed Cup captain Leslie Bowrey has tipped opponents South Africa as favourites for victory in Durban.

Bowrey, who will lead a team comprising Annabel Ellwood, Rachel McQuillan, Kerry-Anne Guse and Kristine



World No. 2 tennis player Martina Hingis, is embraced by her father Karol at Kosice airport, after her arrival to the town where she was born and will represent Switzerland in Federation Cup against Slovakia (Reuters photo)

Hingis gets present from father

KOSICE, Slovakia (R) — Martina Hingis got an emotional kiss and a hug from her father Karol as she arrived on Thursday to play for Switzerland against Slovakia in the Federation Cup at the weekend.

Australian Open champion Martina, shielded by bodyguards, smiled at her father after coming through the passport control at Kosice airport.

The two exchanged a few words after which Karol gave his daughter a small present which looked like a teddy bear and then walked to his car and drove off.

Martina's mother and coach Melanie, divorced from Hingis, looked on at the exchange without comment. A former Czechoslovak tennis star, she has trained Martina since the age of two.

Karol Hingis, a groundskeeper at a local tennis club, has rarely seen his daughter since she left at the age of seven with her mother in 1987 to start a new life in Switzerland.

He last saw his daughter in Brno late last year when she came for a tennis exhibition in the Czech Republic.

Before Martina's plane arrived, Karol had been pacing nervously in the arrival lounge not talking to waiting photographers and journalists.

Radford, said Amanda Coetzer was South Africa's trump Cardo squad is a major obstacle for Australia. Elsewhere Croatia, led by Majoli, face Austria while Korea are at home to Argentina. Slovakia take on Switzerland, who are led by teenage World No. 2 Martina Hingis, and they will be relying heavily on Karina Habsudova.

Timberwolves rout Spurs, finally crack .500 mark

SAN ANTONIO (R) — The Minnesota Timberwolves have finally won more games than they lost.

For the first time in franchise history the Timberwolves are over the .500 mark later than the first month of the NBA season after a 108-89 rout of the San Antonio Spurs Wednesday.

Kevin Garnett scored 17 points and Dean Garrett added 16 for the Timberwolves, who were 2-1 and 4-3 in November and 1-0 in 1990 in their only previous forays beyond .500 since joining the league in 1989.

Donnie Wilkins scored 20 points and Will Perdue added 19 and 17 rebounds for San Antonio, which fell to 13-42 and is assured of its first losing season since 1989.

"They are playing hard and they are hungry to get a taste of success," Spurs guard Vinny Del Negro said of Minnesota.

Al Detroit, Lindsey Hunter and Terry Mills scored 21 points apiece as the Pistons crushed the Golden State Warriors by 33 points, 117-84.

Joe Dumars added 19 points and Grant Hill had 13 and 10 assists for Detroit, winner of seven of its last eight games.

Laurel Sprewell netted 19 points and Chris Mullin had 15 for Golden State, which fell to 0-4 on a six-game road swing.

In Orlando, Dennis Scott and Rony Seikaly scored 26 points apiece as the Magic remained unbeaten

under interim coach Richie Adubato with a 98-86 victory over the Miami Heat. Penny Hardaway added 18 points and seven assists for the Magic, who led by as many as 20 points.

In their final five games under Brian Hill the Magic went 0-5, allowing an average of 107.6 points per game. They are 5-0 under Adubato and allowing 86 points per game.

At Indiana, Reggie Miller scored seven of his 22 points in a game-ending 20-6 run that lifted the Pacers to a 92-78 victory over the Seattle SuperSonics, who had their seven-game winning streak snapped.

In Boston, Mitch Richmond scored 38 points to lead the Sacramento Kings to their first road win over the Celtics in more than 18 years, 111-105.

Billy Owens added 20 points and Olden Polynice just missed a triple-double with 16 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists for the Kings, who had lost their previous 17 games in Boston.

In Milwaukee, Steve Smith scored eight of his 21 points in the third quarter, when the Atlanta Hawks limited the Bucks to a franchise-low eight points en route to a 79-72 victory.

Mookie Blaylock had 18 points and Dikembe Mutombo added 14 and 11 rebounds for the Hawks. Glenn Robinson scored 22 points to lead Milwaukee, which managed just 25 points in the second half.

In Phoenix, Kevin Johnson scored 36 points to

lead the Suns to a 111-104 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers.

Jason Kidd added 19 points, 13 assists, seven rebounds and six steals for the Suns, who blew an eight-point lead in the fourth quarter but recovered for the victory.

In Vancouver, Loy Vaught scored nine of his 22 points in the fourth quarter and added 13 rebounds as the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Grizzlies 83-80.

Malik Sealy sank a pair of free throws with 11 seconds remaining to give the Clippers their 83-80 edge.

Vancouver had a chance to tie, but Anthony Peeler's three-point attempt which fell short at the buzzer.

In Portland, Patrick Ewing scored five of his 27 points in overtime and the New York Knicks took advantage of a late turnover to edge the Trail Blazers 96-95.

Isaiah Rider made a reverse layin as the Blazers closed within 96-95 with 32 seconds to go.

But Trent was stripped of the ball and the Knicks ran out the clock.

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Dalglish hits out at Shearer rumours

NEWCASTLE (AFP) — Kenny Dalglish hit back on Friday at stories suggesting Alan Shearer's third groin operation in 10 months will rule him out for the rest of the season.

"What was needed has been done and everything's straightforward. There are no problems or complications and Alan will be back as soon as he can be," said Dalglish.

"To put a time on that would be misleading. He'll be back when he's fit and well and it's totally frustrating to read stories, without foundation, that show a lack of respect for the

surgery had been a success."

Shearer's latest injury setback has fuelled speculation that Dalglish may buy a new striker before the March transfer deadline.

But Dalglish, who watched Metz player Robert Pires in action against Holland earlier this week, said: "We have enough players here to cover all eventualities."

Les Ferdinand, who needed 10 stitches in a

punter."

head wound during last week's win at Middlesbrough, is fit to face Southampton at St. James' Park tomorrow and is likely to be partnered by either Peter Beardsley or Faustino Asprilla.

But John Beresford, still troubled by a hamstring injury, has been ruled out by Dalglish who said: "He has done some training but the injury hasn't fully cleared up and I'm sure he's frustrated."

Warren Barton is likely to continue in mid-field with David Batty completing a two-match suspension, so Shearer's replacement could be the only change with David Ginola on the bench again.

Dalglish revealed that Newcastle had extended Paul Baryon's loan to Scunthorpe for another month.

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Israeli seizure of ID cards aims at evicting Palestinians from Jerusalem, activist says

By Ghaila Alul
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — According to Israeli laws, if you are a Jerusalemite and have been living abroad for more than seven years, you lose residency rights in the Holy City, a Palestinian official at the Orient House in Jerusalem said this week.

However, "you don't need to panic," Azmi Abu Saoud assures all Palestinians who have not received an official letter revoking their identity cards from the Israeli interior ministry.

"Only those who receive a letter from the ministry stamped with 'A13' should worry," he adds.

Since Nov. 11, over 626 out of 170,000 Palestinians were deprived of their residency rights in the city, Mr. Abu Saoud told the Jordan Times on Thursday, noting that 550 of these people were Jordanians.

These people, he adds, appeared to have failed to prove that Jerusalem is their "centre of life" as required by the Israeli authorities since they started applying this measure in 1994.

"According to Israel, where you sleep is your home as well as your residency," he says.

Under the "centre of life" rule, Jerusalemites should prove that they live, work, and educate their children in Jerusalem in order to maintain their ID cards.

According to the law of entry into Israel of 1952, and related regulations of 1974, Palestinian Jerusalemites have blue ID cards as "permanent residents."

Since 1967, all Palestinian Jerusalemites living abroad were issued reentry visas by the ministry valid for one to three years.

However, permanent residents are liable to lose that status if they live outside Jerusalem for more than seven years or apply for permanent residency or citizenship in a foreign country.

Mr. Abu Saoud explained.

"This is a conspiracy weaved by Israel to Judaize Jerusalem and to make Palestinians, like Armenians, a minority in the city," said Mr. Abu Saoud.

"Jerusalemites did not choose to live outside Jerusalem," Mr. Abu Saoud said. "They were denied the right to establish their lives in the city, either because their homes were demolished or because they were not allowed to build in the city."

And thus, these people were forced to leave to the outskirts of Jerusalem (Azariya, Al Ram, Bir Nabala, etc), thinking they would still enjoy their rights as Jerusalemites.

But, Israel has not warned them that it does not consider these areas as part of Jerusalem any more, and that they would lose their permanent residencies even if they live in the outskirts of Jerusalem, Mr. Abu Saoud said.

"The population distribution shows that 75 per cent of East Jerusalem is occupied by Israelis and only 25 by Palestinians. Roads and green lands make up 14 per cent of the city, Mr. Abu Saoud asserted.

"This unfair distribution was a clear geographic and demographic plan to the advantage of Israeli citizens."

However, he said, the Geneva Conventions, which form the basis for a host of international laws, reject the unilateral annexation of territory seized by force and forbid the occupier from moving its population into the occupied territories and changing the geographic features of the land under occupation.

Also, Mr. Abu Saoud added, in an attempt to decrease the number of Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel has rejected family reunification applications for non-resident spouses.

The Palestinian official was here on a three-day visit

to give advice to Jerusalemites living in Jordan about the possible confiscation of their ID cards.

"I call on all Palestinians not to consider any confiscation letters they might receive as legal, unless these letters were issued by the Israeli ministry of interior," he said.

"We will not comply with any Israeli law. They (Israelis) forced us to carry ID cards and we used them as a convenience and not as a final objective," he argued.

He also warned Palestinians not to sign any Israeli documents while leaving the West Bank through the bridge, as it might be a way forcing them to give up their residency.

"This is a psychological and social pressure inflicted on Palestinians who were forced to sign and compromise their ID cards before leaving the country," he said.

He told the Jordan Times that the Orient House has provided those who have lost their permanent residencies in Jerusalem with health insurance as well as salaries ranging from \$350-\$1,000 according to their social status, providing they do not leave the city.

He said the Palestinian people should stick together in order to overcome this crisis and never leave Jerusalem for whatever reason.

"We should stick together and only hold on to the United Nations resolutions without submitting to the Israeli will," he said.

He also called on His Majesty King Hussein to intervene in order to reach a joint solution for this problem.

Recent statistics show that Palestinians living in Jerusalem are around 50,000. Those who were forced to leave to the outskirts of Jerusalem because of lack of housing are 70,000, and those who migrated are 50,000.



CLASH IN LEBANON: A wounded Israeli soldier is evacuated from a helicopter near the Israel-Lebanon border on Friday after a clash with Hizbollah forces that killed another soldiers (Aircrews faces has been altered) (AFP photo)

Iran quake kills 100

TEHRAN (AFP) — At least 100 people were killed and 250 others injured in a violent earthquake which rocked the mountainous region of Ardabil in northwest Iran on Friday, Tehran Radio reported.

The tremor, which registered 5.5 on the open-ended Richter scale, was the second deadly quake to strike the north of Iran in just over three weeks.

It destroyed or severely damaged many homes at the foot of the Sabalan Mountain range west of Ardabil and caused devastation in 40 villages around Ardabil and in the regions of Nir and Sarein in Iranian Azerbaijan.

Rescuers were able to reach the disaster zone despite the rugged terrain in Ardabil, reputed to be the coldest region in Iran with temperatures sinking to 10 degrees Celsius below freezing (14 degrees Fahrenheit).

State television briefly showed images of the victims being carried into ambulances.

Ardabil, in a mountainous, sometimes inaccessible region west of the Caspian Sea, has been blanketed in snow for several days and the radio reported a heavy snowfall of up to 1.5 metres in some areas on Friday.

The quake, which was followed by several aftershocks, struck residential suburbs of Ardabil city at 4:31 p.m. (1301 GMT), sending residents out into the streets in panic, the official news agency IRNA said.

In the city itself, the quake shattered windows in many buildings and local authorities said telecommunications, water and electricity networks have been damaged in many nearby districts.

IRNA had earlier put the quake's intensity at six.

The French national seismic surveillance centre in Strasbourg had also measured it at six and gave its epicentre at latitude 38.58 degrees north and longitude of 47.95 degrees east, or just west of Ardabil.

IRNA said another quake, measuring 5.5, shook the western Iranian Kurdish city of Sanandaj at 4:28 p.m. (1258 GMT). There was no immediate word of casualties or damage.

The epicentre was 420 kilometres northwest of Tehran. A third tremor with the intensity of four struck the northern province of Gilan bordering the Caspian at 4:30 p.m. (1300 GMT), causing panic but no casualties or damage.

Felt in the city of Rasht, it was the seventh earthquake this year to hit Gilan, which was rocked by a 7.3-strong tremor on June 21, 1990 that left tens of thousands of people dead.

In the same region on Friday, a devastating earthquake struck southwest Pakistan, a country which borders Iran, killing at least 60 people and leaving thousands homeless, Pakistani officials said.

Arafat hopes world, not unrest, will stop Israel..

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Despite warnings that a new Jewish settlement will spark an explosion of violence, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has so far balked at calling the sort of demonstrations which led to unprecedented bloodshed in September.

Mr. Arafat's self-rule authority has called Israel's decision to build the Har Homa neighbourhood in Arab East Jerusalem, Jabal Abu Ghneim a "declaration of war" and warned that it will lead to a repeat of September's clashes which left over 80 people dead.

But so far, Arafat has focused on garnering international pressure on Israel to stop Har Homa, where it plans to build homes for 25,000 Jews in the occupied eastern sector of Jerusalem.

A meeting of Palestinian officials headed by Arafat Thursday in Nablus called for the world "to impose political and economic sanctions against Israel" until it calls off the project.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has asked the U.N. Security Council and the Arab League to condemn the settlement, and Arafat will bring up the issue in talks with U.S. President Bill Clinton when they meet in Washington on Monday.

The project, approved

Wednesday, had brought worldwide condemnation even from Israel's principal ally, the United States, which has said the construction did not "build faith" in the peace process.

But the Palestinian reaction is in contrast to the response to Israel's opening in September of a tourist tunnel near the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City.

At the time, Mr. Arafat immediately called on his people to hit the streets in protest.

A demonstration in Ramallah turned bloody when Israeli soldiers opened fire on the crowds approaching their checkpoint, sparking gunbattles with Palestinian police which then blazed across the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The result was the worst violence in the territories in 30 years, and the four days of riots left 87 dead, mostly Palestinian civilians.

This time, demonstrations on the ground have been small.

"Peaceful protest" was the byword at the demonstrations.

"The situation is different now than September. Then the peace process was entirely blocked, but now there has been some movement," said Ghassan Al Khatib, a specialist from the

Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre.

"Perhaps the authority is not interested (in protests) because of Arafat's trip to the U.S. and because of the further redeployments," he said, referring to Israel's commitment to withdraw in three stages from more areas of the West Bank, starting in March.

Unlike September, when negotiations were stalled, the Har Homa controversy comes at a time when Mr. Arafat has a full agenda of interim talks with Israel which could be endangered in case of unrest, as well as the launching of final-status talks due to begin in mid-March.

But the respite may be temporary. If international pressure fails, Mr. Arafat will have to face the groundswell of public anger at the settlement.

"Palestinians are sick of international condemnations that change nothing. They are furious (about Har Homa)," said Ahmed Al Batch, a Jerusalem representative to the legislative council.

"This can very easily get out of the control of the Palestinian National Authority. The deluge is coming and if it does it will be worse than the events after the tunnel opening," he said.

...but Netanyahu declares 'victory' in settlement plan

TEL AVIV (R) — Defying international and Palestinian protests, a buoyant Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared a victory in the battle for Jerusalem.

But a day after Israel approved the building of thousands of Jewish homes in Arab East Jerusalem, Israeli media reported on Thursday police were likely to recommend charging three central figures in a probe of alleged government corruption.

"I know you came to strengthen me, but I came to strengthen you. I feel very strong," Mr. Netanyahu told a meeting of activists of his Likud party as Israel radio said police would question him again soon and caution him about self-incrimination.

"I have one characteristic, you know. I love challenges. But most of all, I love to win. And we are winning. We set goals for ourselves and we have achieved another one of them," he said, referring to the settlement project.

Mr. Netanyahu is facing political trouble from within.

Israel Radio and television stations said police were likely to seek charges against Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, Shas Party leader Arye Deri and Mr. Netanyahu adviser Avigdor Lieberman.

All have denied any wrongdoing in the short-lived appointment last month of lawyer and Likud activist Roni Bar-On as attorney-general.

Several cabinet ministers have said the government would collapse if the charges proved true.

Meanwhile, the United States and France are seeking to calm Middle East tensions.

But analysts said the decision could spark a new wave of violence over the Holy City at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"This may be a clever diversion in domestic politics but it is an explosive provocation towards the Palestinians and all the players in the peace process," the French daily Liberation said.

The Israeli decision, seen by many analysts as a sop to hardline Netanyahu's most hawkish supporters for last month's pullback from most of the West Bank city of Hebron, was criticised around the world.

The European Union (EU) said it deeply deplored the move and reaffirmed that "settlements in the occupied territories contravene international law and are a major obstacle to peace."

Russia called the decision "ill-considered and untimely." Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto told visiting Israeli Foreign

Minister David Levy it was "a negative element for the Middle East peace process."

Both the United States and France criticised the Israeli move, but in measured terms which diplomats said were designed to keep the door open for peace negotiations and discourage if possible a violent Palestinian reaction.

"The decision taken today further complicates an already complicated situation," White House spokesman David Johnson said.

French President Jacques Chirac told Syrian Vice-President Abdul Halim Khaddam in Paris he was concerned at the development but appealed for a resumption of peace talks, frozen between the Jewish state and Damascus since Mr. Netanyahu was elected last May.

Mr. Khaddam retorted that recent Israeli initiatives showed the Jewish state did not want peace.

French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette is due to visit Syria, Lebanon and Israel from next Tuesday in an effort, coordinated with the United States, to encourage a revival of negotiations between the three countries.

In New York, Arab states called for an emergency Security Council meeting to demand that Israel rescind its decision.



Police nab boys over 'virtual pet' heist

TOKYO (R) — Japanese police took four teenage boys into custody on Friday over the suspected theft of an electronic "virtual pet" game that has become a craze among Japanese youth. Police in Yokohama, south of Tokyo, said they had detained the 14-year-old junior high school boys after a chase involving a police helicopter and several patrol cars. The four are suspected of forcing a fellow student to hand over his "Tamagochi", a highly prized key-ring game featuring an electronic bird-like creature. After receiving an emergency call from the victim, police said they chased the four boys to a shopping area in Yokohama, with a police helicopter helping in surveillance. The alleged victim, also 14, accused the four of stealing another Tamagochi game from him last week, police said. Japanese laws prohibit the identification of minors suspected of committing a crime. The Tamagochi game has been a complete sell-out in Japan and the maker has said fresh supplies will not be available until April. On the streets and on the Internet, second-hand units are being hawked at between 20 to 30 times their retail price of 1,980 yen (\$16).

Taylor marks birthday

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Her head shaven and wrapped in a kerchief, Elizabeth Taylor, convalescing from surgery a week ago to remove a benign brain tumour, celebrated her 65th birthday Thursday at her Bel-Air home. "She's doing great, feeling very good. She's up and around and joking," her spokeswoman Shirene Coburn said. A couple of her kids and her dog were to attend the birthday party. Taylor staged a pre-birthday gala here Feb. 16 before her surgery for some 2,700 people that was broadcast by ABC Television network and raised one million dollars for her AIDS foundation.

Madonna 'searching for her destiny'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — U.S. pop superstar Madonna is exploring the mysteries of the Kabala in hopes of finding her destiny in Jewish mysticism, an Israeli newspaper reported. She attends two classes a week in the Kabala, the mystic branch of Judaism, under the tutelage of Eytan Yardeni, a young Israeli rabbi living in Los Angeles, the daily Yedioth Aharonot said. Madonna has just completed the "elementary" level and has moved up to advanced mysticism, the rabbi told the newspaper's California correspondent. "She sees in the Kabala a way to rule her destiny," Yardeni said. After the birth of her first child, Lourdes, Madonna announced she would raise her daughter in the same Catholic tradition she grew up in — but also expose her to the basics of other religions.

Chinese actress wants censorship relaxed

HONG KONG (AFP) — China's best-known actress Gong Li wants the government to relax its strict censorship of films and the arts, a Hong Kong newspaper reported. Gong told Hong Kong reporters in Beijing that she intended to forward a motion calling for more freedom at the current session of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference. Gong, star of "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Farewell My Concubine" is a member of the conference, even though some of her films have been frowned upon by propaganda officials. The actress said the government should ease censorship and take a more tolerant approach to opening the film industry to producers, saying "it is best to let a bud-dred flowers blossom — a real policy."

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